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INSIDE



Blooming Biz

Island Florals has grown from a mere flower shop into a gift and souvenir establishment that offers a wide array of keepsakes. Its products lines also include souvenir shirts, baby dresses, figurines, scented candles, dining set and native bags.

Page 14



Suicide Bombing

A second suicide bombing in as many days killed up to 47 people Wednesday, pushing the toll in the back-to-back attacks to 100. Again, Iraqis were the targets—this time, a crowd of volunteers for Iraq's new army—in an apparent campaign to wreck U.S. plans to transfer power by summer.

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Valentine's Day

There is something about Valentine's Day cards that makes us smile. Maybe it's because they bring us back to brown-bag mailboxes and elementary-school loves.

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Gov forms Blue Ribbon Committee

Panel tasked to improve government's financial condition

By MARIAN A. MARAYA
REPORTER

The Babauta administration created yesterday a special Blue Ribbon Committee that would focus on solutions to improve the government's financial condition, particularly in retiring its \$99 million cumulative deficit.

The committee is composed of Gov. Juan N. Babauta, Senate President Joaquin G. Adriano, House Speaker Benigno R. Fitial and yet to be named representatives from the NMI Retirement Fund and the business community.

The birth of the special panel came about following the administration's Financial Status Update presentation before members of the 14th Legislature

See GOV on Page 8

Speaker: Governor's overtures 'encouraging'

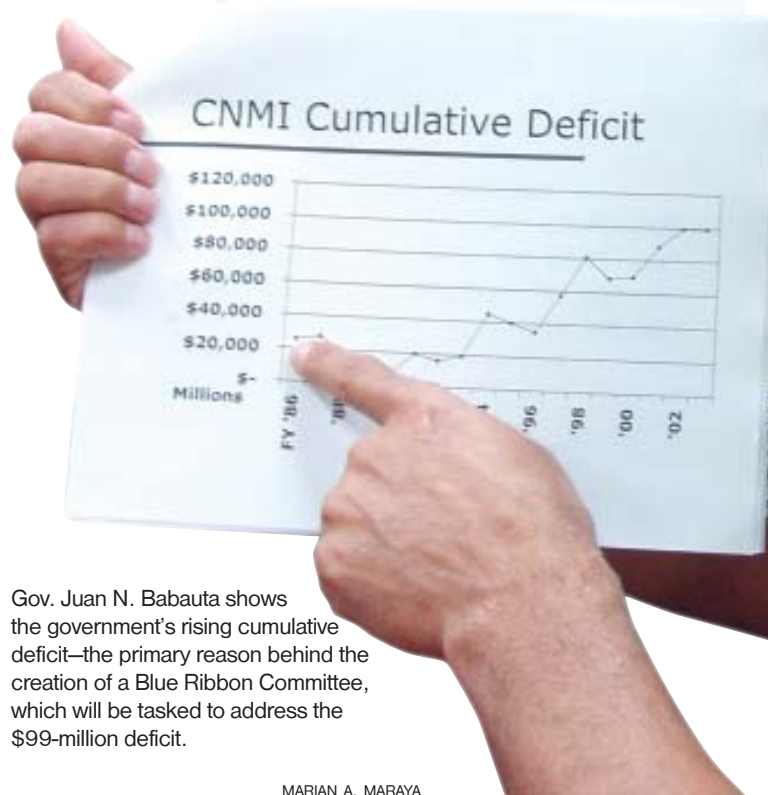
By MARIAN A. MARAYA
REPORTER

House Speaker Benigno R. Fitial came out from yesterday's Financial Status Update meeting optimistic that the Commonwealth's fiscal condition will improve through the combined efforts of CNMI leaders.

"I'm very encouraged by the governor's comments and the initiative of getting the leadership of the Commonwealth together to address the most serious problem of the Commonwealth and that is the financial situation," he told reporters yesterday.

Fitial and House members, along with the

See SPEAKER on Page 8



Gov. Juan N. Babauta shows the government's rising cumulative deficit—the primary reason behind the creation of a Blue Ribbon Committee, which will be tasked to address the \$99-million deficit.

MARIAN A. MARAYA

'Pagan quarry firm violated contract terms'

By LIBERTY DONES
REPORTER

Gov. Juan N. Babauta has questioned the Marianas Public Lands Authority's apparent lack of action on the status of J.G. Sablan Rock Quarry Inc., even as he agrees with findings that the mining firm should have been out of Pagan for violating its contract terms since about 1997.

Babauta pointed out that the "unambiguous" language of the condition specified in J.G. Sablan Rock Quarry's permit indicate that it was in fact automatically terminated effective Sept. 7, 1997.

The quarry firm's Sept. 8, 1995 permit stated that "this permit shall terminate automatically should [J.G. Sablan Rock Quarry] fail to generate

and/or report any revenue to government from its activities on the premises for two consecutive years."

The firm has reportedly failed to generate revenues from the venture but it continues to keep its permit up to now.

"In light of the recent discharge by the MPLA of amounts owed by [J.G. Sablan

See PAGAN on Page 8

I-Connect restores services

By JOHN RAVELO
REPORTER

Telecommunications firm I-Connect disclosed that it has fully restored its services to normal, just days after the explosion at its tower facility on Mt. Tapochau.

I-Connect general manager Manny Andaya said the



company completed reviving its services Wednesday night. The Federal Bureau of Investigation finished processing the crime scene earlier on the same day.

Late Saturday night's blast
See I-CONNECT on Page 8

Local

trends

House gears up for its first session

By **MARIAN A. MARAYA**
REPORTER

A slew of bills, local bills and resolutions have been prefiled at the House Clerk’s office, totaling 16 as of Thursday morning in anticipation of the first regular House session that is just three days away.

The legislative measures—which largely deals with appropriation for pending projects—were mostly submitted by returning members, most of them congressmen belonging to the Republican minority that had dominated the 13th House of Representatives.

House Clerk Evelyn Fleming confirmed to reporters yesterday that more bills are expected to be filed, especially on the session day itself, which is Feb. 9.

Other members are reportedly still finalizing bills they are poised to introduce. One member is reportedly planning to float as many as 20 measures on Monday.

Asked what can be expected on the 14th House’s very first session, Vice Speaker Timothy

Villagomez yesterday said: “A variety of things.”

“The leadership has been meeting. But what’s more important is that the leadership...has been meeting with some of the agencies for the last couple of weeks and getting input from them. Like I said, we want to hear from them on what the Legislature can do to assist the departments.

“That’s what’s been keeping us busy and a lot of the bills that we’ll be introducing is a result of the efforts from both agencies and Legislature. So it’s not just one-sided,” said Villagomez.

The Covenant-ruled House will convene for a regular session for the first time on Monday, alongside one Democrat member, seven Republicans and one independent member.

Despite the different party affiliations, the vice speaker expressed optimism that cooperation will rule in this Legislature.

“I think everyone of us has a common goal and that’s to help. And that’s always been my philosophy and I’m sure that once we go to the chamber,

everyone is going to look at the common good of why we’re here,” said Villagomez.

The prefiled bills are mostly the same measures that never made it through the previous Legislature.

Among them are House Bill 14-1 by Rep. Joe Guerrero which seeks to appropriate \$5.58 million for 702 CIP Covenant funding for certain CIP in FY03; and HB 14-2 by Rep. David Apatang and other minority members, which

appropriates \$1.5 million for various CIP projects in the three senatorial districts.

Other prefiled House bills include those by Rep. Benjamin Seman: the proposed Nursing Practice Act, Tobacco Settlement Escrow Enforcement Act, Domestic Violence Act, Anti-Stalking Act, sin tax appropriation, Inhalant Abuse

Act and the Commonwealth Respite Service Program.

Rep. Norman Palacios has put forward four bills, including the proposed Tinian Marine Reserve Act; the appropriation of \$575,000 for the Tinian museum; and the proposal to authorize the commercial operation of amusement machines at CNMI’s seaports and airports.

Note: with mug of Tim Villagomez.

dehins kasya

conwood

cbcruz

baby news

mcdo

Utilities commission proposed

The House of Representatives entertained the introduction of legislation proposing to establish a Public Utilities Commission—or a regulatory body seen to control rates imposed for water, electricity, cable television and telecommunication services.

Vice Speaker Timothy Villagomez, chairman of the standing committee on Public Utilities, Transportation and Communications, offered the bill during the lower chamber’s 3pm session yesterday.

He explained that the bill essentially seeks to create a commission that would mainly be responsible for setting utilities rate structure.

Villagomez, in an interview, noted that this concept of forming the PUC is not foreign. “This has been introduced in the past. I even spoke with members of the Legislature [about this]

while I was CUC executive director. This is something that is a good thing to do.”

“This particular commission will have the expertise in power, in telecommunication, in cable television and so forth that would formulate rates and regulations with regard to fees,” said the PUTC chairman.

Under the present setup, Villagomez noted that the CUC board single-handedly sets and regulates utility rates.

“So sometimes, that could be a very confusing, powerful thing. They set their own rates and that’s it. The PUC would be the agency where customers can complain as to why the rate is like this. This is the commission like any commission that you have in most states, that would be the brainstorm of all the other utilities,” said Villagomez.

(Marian A. Maraya)

DPS urges parents to avail of its car seat voucher program

By EDITH G. ALEJANDRO
REPORTER

In another move to encourage passenger safety for children, the Department of Public Safety is encouraging parents to avail of the ongoing voucher program that gives a \$50 discount to parents buying car seats and car restraints from participating vendors in the Commonwealth.

DPS-Office of Special Services head Maj. Juan Salas said the program—Child Restraint Purchase Assistance Program— is ongoing and parents should take advantage of the grant as the agency offers one voucher per family in the Northern Marianas.

Salas said the project has been going on since 1997 and the OSS has already given away vouchers to several families.

“This has been going on for the last several years. Parents should take advantage of the project since this is a good opportunity for them. They can save \$50 for this voucher when they purchase a car seat for their child,” said the OSS head.

To avail of the voucher, parent should get a price quotation form from the OSS and present their child’s birth certificate, a driver’s license or

vehicle registration of the car. All documents are needed for record purposes.

Once the voucher is issued, parents would have to present the quotation form to participating vendors on island: Ace Hardware, Joeten Supermarket, Liberty Plaza/YCO Corp., Carmen’s Baby News, Town House, and Price Costco.

Earlier, Carmen’s Baby News donated three car seats to the OSS and the Safe and Sober Foundation to step up its awareness campaign on the proper use of children’s car restraint.

The three car seats—one infant, one convertible, and one booster—were handed to Safe and Sober Foundation president Janice Tenorio during a brief ceremony held by Carmen’s Baby News manager Rita Dela Cruz.

The donation was the first ever token received by the Safe and Sober Foundation, the leading agency that collaborates with the DPS and the Office of Special Services for its Child Passenger Safety awareness campaign.

Dela Cruz said the donation was in close coordination with the foundation and the DPS’ Child Passenger Safety Awareness Month to help law enforcers on the proper use of child restraints.

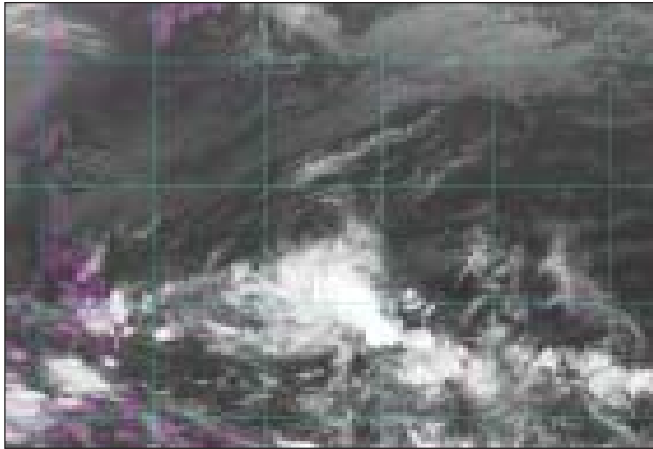
said the sites have excessive concentration of fecal indicator bacteria—enterococci.

In a media statement, the DEQ said the situation could indicate the presence of animal or human wastes in the waters. But the agency also said the bacteria could have contaminated the waters through stormwater runoff.

On Rota, the DEQ said none of the beach sites had excessive bacterial concentrations based on water sampling tests.

(John Ravelo)

WEATHER FORECAST



PICTURE TIME: 1:00 A.M., FEBRUARY 12, 2004
Western North Pacific between Equator and 25N from 130E to 180.

A monsoon trough stretches from 5n130e to a circulation centered south-southwest of Guam near 10n144e...then continues southeastward to the equator at 165e. The circulation at 10n144e is the subject of a tropical cyclone formation alert issued by the alternate joint typhoon warning center. For more information...see WTPN21 PGTW. Heavy rain and isolated thunderstorms associated with the circulation are found near and north of the center. .within 75 miles of a line from 13n141e to 10n144e. Other scattered showers are occurring across the Mariana Islands...between 13n and 18n from 144e to 149e. A narrow band of showers extends southwest from the center to 7n138e...then west to 9n132e. Along the eastern portion of the monsoon trough...scattered showers and isolated thunderstorms are occurring between the Equator and 10n from 148e to 159e...including Chuuk and Pohnpei. Trade-wind convergence is generating scattered showers over the Marshall Islands between 3n and 8n from 168e to 180e. A shear line extending from 23n154e to 18n130e is producing extensive low-level cloudiness and light rain along and up to 200 miles north of the boundary.

SAIPAN AND TINIAN
Partly cloudy with isolated showers.
Winds: Southeast at 15 mph. Highs near 85. Lows near 75.

GUAM AND ROTA
Partly cloudy with isolated showers.
Winds: Southeast at 15 mph. Highs near 85. Low near 75.

PALAU
Mostly cloudy with isolated showers.
Winds: East at 10 kt.

POHNPEI
Mostly cloudy with scattered showers & isolated thunderstorms.
Winds: East at 15-20 kt.

YAP AND ULITHI
Mostly cloudy with isolated showers.
Winds: Southeast 5-10 kt.

KOSRAE
Mostly cloudy with scattered showers.
Winds: East at 15 kt.

CHUUK
Mostly cloudy with scattered showers.
Winds: East at 15 kt.

MAJURO
Mostly cloudy with scattered showers.
Winds: East at 15-20 kt.

	CITY	FORECAST	HIGH	LOW
	Auckland	Rain	73F (23C)	56F (13C)
	Beijing	Partly Cloudy	52F (11C)	30F (-1C)
	Hong Kong	Partly Cloudy	68F (20C)	55F (13C)
	Honolulu	Partly Cloudy	82F (28C)	68F (20C)
	London, England	Cloudy	52F (11C)	43F (6C)
	Los Angeles	Sunny	74F (23C)	46F (8C)
	Manila	Showers	87F (31C)	72F (22C)
	Melbourne	Rain	70F (21C)	57F (14C)
	Miami	Partly Cloudy	84F (29C)	67F (19C)
	New York City	Partly Cloudy	36F (2C)	30F (-1C)
	Osaka	Partly Cloudy	43F (6C)	26F (-3C)
	Paris	Cloudy	46F (8C)	35F (2C)
	Pusan	Sunny	48F (9C)	33F (1C)
	Rome	Sunny	44F (7C)	26F (-3C)
	Salem, Oregon	Rain	50F (10C)	40F (4C)
	San Francisco	Sunny	60F (16C)	47F (8C)
	Seoul	Partly Cloudy	40F (4C)	24F (-4C)
	Tokyo, Japan	Partly Cloudy	45F (7C)	37F (3C)
	Washington, DC	Sunny	42F (6C)	31F (-1C)

Consultant advises CUC to focus on environment, personnel issues

By LIBERTY DONES
REPORTER

Engineering consultant Harris Group is advising the Commonwealth Utilities Corp. to address environmental and personnel issues as it pursues the privatization of its main power plants in Lower Base.

CUC executive director Lorraine A. Babauta, in a report to the CUC board, said that Harris Group advised the utility firm to look at the related environmental impacts of the project.

In particular, it said CUC needs to check on the U.S. Clean Air Act and Pre-certification that would prove that bidders “have technology and experience with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.”

At the same time, the CUC needs to address local environmental requirements, as well as plant facility and land lease ownership issues.

Babauta said the consulting firm also said that “CUC must determine how its partnership will deal with existing employees.”

This would prevent conflict if problems such as personnel layoff arise.

Babauta said the CUC board also needs to act quickly whether it wants to retain ownership of fuel tanks and fuel or whether the vendors will be given options to take over fuel operations.

The CUC board earlier

approved the hiring of Harris Group at \$103,000 to do the scope of work and evaluation of proposals for the privatization project.

CUC earlier said that Harris Group would assist the utility corporation “till the end” to ensure that “we attract the best of the best in global energy producers to partner with our utility, bringing Saipan customers and commercial firms reliable electricity at the cheapest costs.”

CUC said that Harris Group’s scope of work involves the current and future energy requirements for Saipan, based on various economic factors or clients and their potential use of electricity.

This, even as the 13th Senate earlier cautioned the CUC to be cautious in its privatization program, putting in mind the personnel safety at the power plant.

Former senator Ramon Guerrero had said that power plant personnel are being put in danger every time the CUC overloads its engines.

Guerrero said the CUC should resort to load sharing, and not be in the habit of putting more loads than what the engines can handle.

The CUC has received proposals from two proposers since last September.

Initial assessments previously presented by a potential bidder showed that CUC’s main

power plants equipment are very old, run on expensive gas oil, and are not being adequately maintained.

These are the reasons why the cost of power generation on the island is high, according to Seaboard Ship Management Inc., a Florida-based company that visited CUC’s power plants in spring 2003.

“The equipment available for generation of power is outdated, inefficient, and represents a mix of really old engines being utilized as base power units for power generation,” the report said.

It also said that CUC’s power transmission and distribution systems are

“generally old, inefficient, and are over extended beyond its original capacity causing hefty line losses.”

The transmission system requires essential improvements and upgrading, including the installation of a new high voltage transmission line with substation to connect the existing and expanding grid system, it said.

In its proposal, the company said that the existing power plants should be replaced with possibly 35 to 55 MW of new and efficient power. It also said there is a need to install a new 69 KV transmission line loop and a substation to connect lower voltage transmission and distribution systems.

Land settlement checks out today

By LIBERTY DONES
REPORTER

The Marianas Public Lands Authority said that it will issue the first land compensation settlement checks today.

MPLA deputy commissioner Frank Eliptico said that no less than Gov. Juan N. Babauta will present the payment check to a land claimant during a brief ceremony to be held at the MPLA office in Chalan Kanoa at 1pm today.

This, as the MPLA board, which has achieved a quorum with the entry of new Rota member Benita Manglona, meets this morning to formally approve the land settlement payment.

“The first check will be issued at 1pm,” said Eliptico.

The issuance of settlement checks has been delayed lately due to the MPLA board’s lack of quorum following the resignation of member Pedro Atalig and the term expiration of Pedro Igitol.

The board is now composed of three members: Ana Demapan-Castro as chairperson, Manny Villagomez as vice chair, and Manglona.

Previously, the delay was caused by the pending approval of the \$40-million bond floated

by the Commonwealth Development Authority.

The bond money was made available late last year.

The MPLA said it has given land settlement offers to 62 land claimants. Forty-three of them have accepted the offers.

These would be the first batch of claimants to receive the settlement checks beginning today.

movie station

nikko

cars unlimited

Opinion

Saipan Tribune

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EDITORIAL

Gore's Game

There goes Al Gore again. Remaking himself. Remaking the Democratic Party. Remaking America. Or so he says.

The former Democratic nominee for president shook up the 2004 Democratic presidential race by endorsing Howard Dean for the nomination. Gore's blessing gives the former Vermont governor, who has been running as an insurgent, the patina of support from the party establishment. And it solidifies Dean's position as the front-runner for the nomination, as unlikely as that may seem.

Does that mean the race is over? Not so fast! Not when there hasn't been a vote cast yet. There's too much about Dean that isn't known. And it is ridiculously presumptive of the media, us included, to award the nomination before any real Democratic voters have been heard from. Let's wait for Iowa, New Hampshire and then all the big states to weigh in.

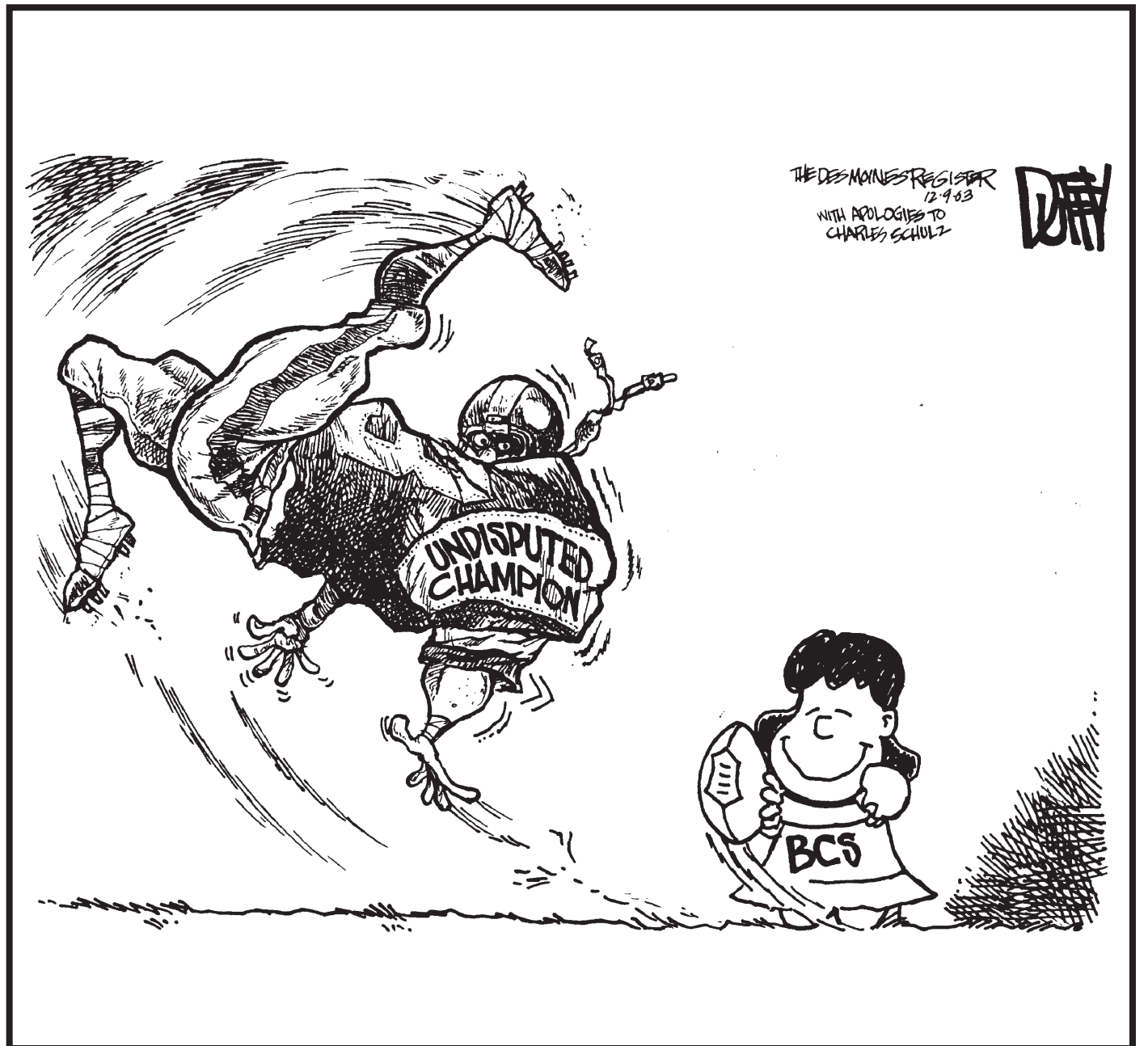
Still, Gore's announcement in the city yesterday was a stunner. Insiders say Gore, who models himself a futurist, was taken with Dean's New Age campaign, especially his use of the Internet to connect with young voters. And Gore, the former vice president, agreed with Dean's early opposition to the war in Iraq.

But while Gore's endorsement will help Dean's candidacy gain a certain credibility, Gore is a somewhat tarnished figure who has grown smaller since he lost the contested election to George W. Bush in 2000. One of the things that hurt Gore the most was the sense that he was constantly "remaking" himself, changing from blue suits to brown, from new Democrat to old. There was a sense of unguineness about Gore, which was not necessarily fair but still hurt him politically. Now he's saying the party has to "remake" itself.

What's his game? Some people were upset that Gore didn't even bother to notify his 2000 running mate, Sen. Joe Lieberman of Connecticut, that he was endorsing Dean. It's legitimate to ask how Gore could have chosen Lieberman to be the man to run the nation if anything happened to him and now bypass Lieberman for a man with no Washington experience.

Maybe Gore wants to pick up the New Age voting base that Dean has attracted and use it himself for a run in 2008 if Bush is re-elected. Remake or no, it's still all about politics.

Newsday



Nothing beats a direct flight

For Filipinos—and other members of the community who travel between the Northern Marianas and the Philippines, Continental Airlines' decision to start serving the Saipan-Manila route again is a welcome development. It practically shortens the flying time, thus, making it a stress-free process.

Majority of us have our own personal encounters with a layover—either on Guam or in Seoul, South Korea. And more often than not, it is more straining than fun, no matter how big the airport is or how good the shops are, and how short the layover time is.

I have personal encounters with a layover that is longer than the actual trip itself. I still unfortunately remember strolling around the Guam International Airport for 10 grueling hours when I was once sent to Palau for an assignment. I was literally trapped inside the Guam airport because I didn't have a U.S. visa then to allow me entry into the island-territory.

Just this year, I had to wait 12 backbreaking hours inside South Korea's Incheon International Airport when I attended—together with journalists from all over Asia—a roundtable discussion on migration issues in Bangkok, Thailand.

My Palau and Thailand trips are not what you would say a regular destination among most of us, especially Filipino nonresident workers in the CNMI who mostly touch base once every year. But this year's suspension of the Transit Without Visa program forced a big number of us away from the usual Saipan-Guam-Manila flights offered by Continental Airlines into Asiana Airlines' Saipan-Incheon-Manila service, or Northwest Airlines' Saipan-Japan-Manila route.

There's nothing wrong with stopping over Incheon or Narita on our way to the Philippines but there are also some factors to consider. It's still cheap to take Asiana's Saipan-Incheon-Manila flight but the route practically lengthens the traveling time: 2 hours advance check-in plus 3.5 hours flying time from Saipan to South Korea plus 2 hours layover in Incheon plus about 3 hours flying time from Seoul to Manila equals about 10 exhausting hours of traveling.

Yet still, many travelers put more weight on the extra money they would save by sacrificing a little time strolling around South Korea's gorgeous Incheon airport, with all the fascinating retail shops

By ALDWIN R. FAJARDO

The views expressed are strictly that of the author.
Fajardo is the editor of the Saipan Tribune.



and food establishments sprawling inside it.

Northwest also offers a very tempting package for Manila-bound travelers but it doesn't seem to suit most Filipino workers' travel desires due to strict visa requirements implemented by the Japanese government. Still, a possible visit to the Tokyo Disneyland is still a major thing to consider.

A direct service between Saipan and Manila is the best solution to Philippine-bound passengers' traveling dilemma. Bottom line is, nothing beats a direct service, especially if the destination is only about three hours away from the point of origin.

■ ■ ■ ■ ■

We are now in the process of reviewing the accomplishments of those who have made it to the final list of nominees for the annual Saipan Tribune Person of the Year. The Tribune gives this award each year—now on its fifth year—to recognize the efforts and commitment of those who untiringly and consistently do their part in making the CNMI a better place to live in.

Like last year, we will be naming one Person of the Year for 2003 and nine honorable mentions. Nominees are judged based on the impacts of their contributions or efforts on the lives or overall well-being of the people or the community they intended to serve.

Among those who have been recognized in the last five years were: HIV/AIDS educator Moses Saburo (1999); Ports Authority executive director Carlos Salas and then-board chairman Roman S. Palacios, and then-House Speaker Ben Fitial (2000); David Borja, former principal of Hopwood Junior High School (2001); and Rota Mayor Benjamin T. Manglona for 2002.

Who will it be this year?

The adult GPA

Whether it's the Commonwealth seeking to float \$40 million in bonds, or your brother in law trying to finance a car, it seems like every entity and living being on the planet has got a credit rating and credit score appended to their name.

Oh, yuck, credit scores. Does anyone really want to hear about those?

Well, the good citizens of the Commonwealth should, given that the ghost of the Union Bank of California may be haunting your financial records. UBOC is long gone from our shores, but if you held a UBOC credit card, you may have been subjected to a little surprise. At issue is the fact that UBOC actually transferred some or all (I've been told it was all) of its credit card business to another company.

The transfer actually pre-dated UBOC's exodus from our fair shores, and the two events were entirely unrelated.

If you ever dealt with UBOC, you'll recall that they were a prime bank, a quality outfit. UBOC, is a corporate cousin of the Bank of Tokyo Mitsubishi, and the Japanese focus on excellent customer service was certainly a hallmark of UBOC's operations. First Hawaiian Bank, as you know, picked up UBOC's action here and retained many of the excellent staffers, which was good news for the community.

On the less happy end of things, when UBOC slipped its credit card business to another company, things didn't end so well. You have to be very careful who you deal with in the credit card industry, since not all companies are honorable.

As for any former UBOC customers, then, you should review your records carefully. If you have a credit card that has "Union Bank of California" stamped on the front, it may not really be issued by UBOC. Yikes! If you find some unknown company lurking in the background on that one, I'd advise closing the account immediately and taking your business to another place. This is a "consumer alert" from me, and I'll be happy to compile reader feedback on this note, so feel free to e-mail me any experience you may have had along these lines. I have uncovered some disturbing information on the topic and my interest is piqued, big time.

Since I'm on the credit topic, I'll mention that American Express, as well as at least one credit reporting agency, is selling a credit monitoring service. These guys eyeball your credit activity on a daily basis, in order to prevent identity theft or other monkey business from messing with your records. I paid 99 buckaroos to enroll in the service for one year. Cheapskate that I am, I think it's worth dropping a C-note on the deal.

Credit records have become the Grade Point Average of adult life. It's worth keeping an eye on your files.

Meanwhile, I'm gathering the writing files for next year; we've got a lot of ground to cover. The Commonwealth economy will be the hot topic, of course. And—drum roll—yours truly is preparing to launch a new business that you'll be hearing about, which is why I've been in meetings with attorneys this week and have not answered anyone's calls or e-mails. So much for goofing off during the holidays. In fact, I get so worn out planning for 2004 already that I'm wishing that 2003 would last a couple of months longer. I guess that Santa can't deliver more time to even the best of boys and girls.



By ED STEPHENS

Ed Stephens, Jr. is an economist and columnist for the Saipan Tribune. "Ed4Saipan@yahoo.com"

Some soulful memories in papa's bag

You had to take off your shoes. No shoes on the gym floor. No sneakers, either. Not if you were going to do the James Brown during a pep rally at my high school. And during those years, from 1966 to 1968, whenever the band broke into, say, "Papa's Got a Brand New Bag," you were going to do the James Brown. You had to.

If Martin Luther King Jr. was telling us to stride toward freedom, Brown was showing us how to glide toward it. And of course, we all wanted to arrive in style.

Unlike the twist or the funky chicken, the James Brown required both frenzy and precision—qualities that represented the tensions of our times as we moved from the regimented life of Old South segregation (my school was Booker T. Washington High in Shreveport, La.) toward a world where you could finally say it loud, "I'm Black and I'm Proud!"

The Kennedy Center Honors that Brown received Sunday brought back those memories.

"We honor one of the most influential musicians of the last 50 years," Kennedy Center Chairman James A. Johnson said of Brown. That would put the onset of Brown's influence pretty close to the start of my life.

Last year, I read a profile of Brown in the New Yorker magazine that led me to the conclusion that given Soul Brother No. 1's troubles with the drug PCP and the police, his struggles with past wives, mistresses, girlfriends and others, along with the fallout from some peculiar political stands, he was lucky to be alive.

"Race, poverty and exclusion were the defining features of James Brown's childhood world, and he might easily have seen himself as cursed," Philip Gourevitch wrote in the New Yorker. "Instead, he seems to have understood himself to be a free agent—denied the comforts of a conventional home, but also spared its constraints—with no choice but to fight for emancipation however he could."

Did that explain Brown's weird behavior—or how he survived in spite of it? Did too much adulation and exaltation lead him to believe that he could do no wrong? A Look magazine article in 1969 declared: "James Brown is a new important leader. His constituency dwarfs Stokely Carmichael's and the late Dr. Martin Luther King's." Did such twisted statements go to his head?

All I know is that during adolescence, I'd break out in a cold

“With each repetition, he invested the monosyllable with a different emotional accent and stress—prayer and pride, impatience and invitation—and although there was ache in his voice, he did not sound like a man pleading so much as commanding what was rightfully his.”

By COURTLAND MILLOY
The Washington Post



sweat right along with the Godfather of Soul. I never knew why papa needed a brand-new bag, unless it had wine in it; but I knew what to say when I got something new: "I feel good!" or "I got the feeling!"

And the only way to express that feeling was to do the James Brown—to glide on one leg, if you could, with head bobbing and fists pumping, then spin, jump and fall into a 180-degree split, then snap back up—unhurt—and resume your glide.

I also knew how it felt not to get anything at all, especially from a girl. Again, Brown provided words and rhythm suitable to the occasion in what must be the best begging song of all time by a male vocalist, "Please, Please, Please."

I counted the word "please" 25 times—seven times back-to-

back at the start—on a recording that lasts less than three minutes.

Gourevitch dissected Brown's performance: "With each repetition, he invested the monosyllable with a different emotional accent and stress—prayer and pride, impatience and invitation—and although there was ache in his voice, he did not sound like a man pleading so much as commanding what was rightfully his."

This was not a song for doing the James Brown. Our band couldn't play it, and nobody but Brown could sing it. You couldn't whistle or hum it, either. You could, however, put it on a record player to convey your desire for that special someone to stay just a little longer.

Oh, yes. Good God almighty. Honey, please. Don't. Ohhh. Oh, yeah. Lord. I love you so. Pleeceeeeee. Don't go. Pleece-ee-ee-ease. Don't go. Honey, please don't go. Oh. I love you so. Please. Please.

Singer Bonnie Raitt was quoted in the Kennedy Center Honors program as saying about Brown, "You couldn't even list how many people have been influenced by him."

If only she knew how true that was.

Foreign currencies and CNMI's economy

How do changes in value of foreign currencies affect the CNMI's economy?

International currencies, which are free floating, trade like commodities in the international financial markets and their values are determined on buying and selling volumes. However, some countries keep the value of their currencies fixed and only change as they deem necessary or due to international pressure. Examples of free floating currencies are Japanese yen and American dollar while Chinese yuan is fixed in value. Exchange rates are expressed as value of one country's currency in terms of another country's currency. For example, current price or value of Japanese Yen in terms of U.S. dollar is around 110 yen per dollar, similar to how we express the price of a commodity, such as 2 pounds of bananas per dollar.

When the value of a given country's currency rises its products become expensive to other countries to buy and vice versa. For example, U.S. dollar value against yen has decreased from about 120 to 110 yen in about a year. It means that the prices of the Japanese products for us have increased and the prices of our products to Japanese have decreased. In our case, the CNMI's products and services are cheaper to Japanese visitors because the fall in the value of dollar in terms of yen has increased their buying power. This is also a very favorable factor to get more visitors or the visitors who come here to spend more. On the other hand for the Japanese investors who have to send back their investment returns to their parent companies, this factor is unfavorable because it has reduced the yen value of their returns. It has also reduced the yen value of salaries of Japanese business managers who work here.

Now, looking at the Philippines' case whose currency has been consistently falling against the dollar, this has an opposite effect to

“It would be in the best interest of Filipino workers to keep their savings in dollars and send home only enough to meet the needs of their families. Unlike Filipino workers Chinese workers don't have incentive to keep their saving here because the value of their currency is fixed by the government.”

By DR. MOHAMMAD ASHRAF



that of Japan. As soon as the Philippine peso falls, it implies an automatic rise in the wages of Filipino workers in the CNMI because they get paid in dollars. In this case it would be in the best interest of Filipino workers to keep their savings in dollars and send home only enough to meet the needs of their families. Unlike Filipino workers, Chinese workers don't have incentive to keep their savings here because the value of their currency is fixed by the government. As you may have noticed in the national news media the matter of

fixed value of Chinese Yuan (RMB) is under serious debate between the U.S. and China. The U.S. government thinks the Chinese are keeping the value of their currency artificially low, which makes U.S. products expensive in China and Chinese products cheaper in the US. The logic behind this argument is there is over a \$100 billion trade deficit between the U.S. and

China. The United States is asking China to set higher rate of its currency or expect retaliatory actions.

In conclusion, I would say our government has no influence whatsoever on the value of any currency and we have to learn to live with the consequences of changing values of currencies particularly in our region. I may also add the news reporting of currency rates would be a valuable service to businesses and workers alike.

Saipan Tribune

CNMI'S FIRST DAILY NEWSPAPER

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Guam betel nut blight worsens

Guam’s pugua trees still are in grave danger.

Department of Agriculture Director Paul Bassler estimated that as of Tuesday, 5,000 to 10,000 pugua, or betel nut, trees in the south have been infected with a deadly fungus, up from an estimate of just hundreds in late December.

So far, he said, it doesn’t appear that the fungal infection has spread to trees farther north than Merizo and the outskirts of Inarajan and Umatac, but that danger will swell as soon as winds begin to blow from the south. The last few months, most of the winds have been blowing the opposite direction, Bassler said.

Merizo resident and pugua farmer Ben Champaco has lost about 50 of his 600 to 700 pugua plants, and he fears his losses might multiply.

Champaco said the infection has increased the prices of the nuts, which are chewed on Guam and throughout Micronesia.

Many people are selling three nuts for \$2.25, Champaco said, a price

much inflated from the normal four or five for a dollar.

Champaco said he has kept his prices lower out of sympathy for pugua chewers.

The Agriculture Department has asked Merizo Mayor Rita Tainatongo to contact all the residents of her village and ask them to cut down and burn infected trees.

Champaco said he would be willing to cut down and burn his infected trees, but he worries about how well the trees, which are still green, will burn. He said he would like more help and advice from the Department of Agriculture than he has received so far.

Tainatongo expressed concern over the potential loss of the island’s pugua.

“A lot of the farmers are pretty much upset because they depended on this; they’d take it out and sell it for some money-making,” she said. “And not only that, but in this culture, people just love to chew betel nut. ... But eventually, if this disease continues, they will be banning betel nuts from Malesso.”

It’s necessary to cut down and burn infected trees, Bassler said, because the fungus can spread quickly through microscopic spores, which are easily blown around and dispersed in the wind and rain.

So far, there have been no confirmed cases of infection in the island’s northern villages, Bassler said.

In December, the fungus was identified as the same fungus that eradicated Saipan’s pugua crops eight years ago. After they are infected, the trees generally die within weeks.

A fungicide that can be used to protect uninfected trees is on island, Bassler said, but it has not been found to be very effective because it washes off easily in the rain.

Bassler said the department recommends mixing the fungicide with another chemical that sticks to trees somewhat better and might be able to stay on through light rains. He said farmers should contact the department’s Plant Inspection Station for more information. **(PDN/PIR)**

SPEAKER

From Page 1

Senate, joined Gov. Juan N. Babauta and Executive Branch officials in a discussion over the CNMI’s current fiscal state.

The financial update, which projected stable government revenue streams for the rest of the year, recommended solutions on how to rid the CNMI of its \$99 million cumulative deficit. **(See related story)**

While some of the proposed solutions are in line with the House’s vision, Fitial stated that members are bent on suggesting their own.

The presiding officer declined to comment on what specific recommendations the House would be inclined to support, noting that the newly formed Blue Ribbon Committee would take a close look at the list.

Among others, the Department of Finance suggested suspending rebate payments, reducing government expenditures and privatization of some government functions as ways to retire the cumulative deficit.

“Well, we have a very serious financial problem. Everybody knows that and that’s why we’re getting together to seriously address the problem. We are determined to solve the problem,” said Fitial.

“I’m very encouraged by the governor’s initiative to get the leadership of the Commonwealth together to finally address the most serious problem of the Commonwealth. Like I said, I am determined to put in all the efforts I can and come up with workable solutions,” he added.

Fitial, during the inaugural session of the 14th House of Representatives, had stressed the need for the chamber

to work cooperatively with the 14th Senate and the Babauta administration, especially on efforts to revive the Commonwealth’s ailing economy.

“I am pleased to inform all of you that we have agreed in principle to put politics aside and work together to help revive the CNMI economy so we can help create wealth and jobs for the people of the Commonwealth,” he said during the inauguration last Jan. 12.

The speaker also disclosed that House leaders, together with the Senate leadership, would create a joint legislative committee that would meet regularly to tackle important pieces of legislation.

Fitial earlier stressed that the Commonwealth is faced with serious problems that could destroy the livelihood of the people of the CNMI, especially the poor ones, if immediate action is not taken to halt this slide.

Taisakan cited findings from the Office of the Public Auditor indicating that J.G. Sablan is in breach of the terms and conditions of the permit agreement for many years now.

Early last year, a potential investor also questioned the continued operations of the quarry operator, which it alleged has shown no proof of production for several years now.

Kenneth James Moore, chairman of Arizona-based Azmar Foundation, said that J.G. Sablan, has had contractual control over approximately one half of the area of deposits for the past 10 years but up to now “it has apparently failed to bring the project to fruition.”

Azmar said that, under MPLA rules, a company that shows no proof of production within a period of time—normally two years—can be terminated. The MPLA had denied Asmar’s 20-year proposal to quarry pozzolan and basalt on Pagan.

MPLA had clarified, though, that its decision was not entirely a denial. It said Azmar can still do its work at Mt. Pagan for two years as earlier approved.

The MPLA said it had already canceled the permits of two operators: CNMI Mining and Far East Co. “for non-performance.” All three companies, including JG Sablan, were reportedly issued Mt. Pagan permits during the time of Gov. Froilan Tenorio.

Palau wins German award for shark protection

For its fiery stance against shark finning, Palau has received the “Shark Guardian of the Year” award from a German conservation organization.

In the last year, Palau passed a law banning shark finning, the controversial practice of cutting off the high-valued shark fins and tossing the shark body overboard. Palau also took the additional step of banning shark fishing altogether.

That new law followed Palau President Tommy Remengesau setting fire to a gasoline-doused pile of seized shark fins. The act was meant to notify foreign fishermen that Palau sharks were off limits and to call attention to the need for stronger laws protecting sharks. Under the old law, Palau only prevented vessels from targeting sharks with specific tackle.

Palau followed that shark fin blaze with another bonfire in January after the first vessel found with shark fins was stopped under the new law. Remengesau said he again wanted to send a message to foreign fishermen, adding that it was hypocritical for Palau to ban the practice and then sell the fins. The haul was worth \$180,000.

“Palau was the winner due to its outstanding work to protect their marine resources,” said Harald Baensch, vice president of SharkProject.

Across the Pacific and the globe, fishermen have increasingly targeted sharks for markets in Southeast Asia where the expensive dish of shark fin soup is widely popular. Marine biologists say sharks reproduce slowly and overfishing quickly kills off shark populations. **(PDN/PIR)**

GOV

From Page 1

yesterday.

The Department of Finance, which painted the CNMI’s prevailing financial picture in a closed-door gathering of lawmakers and Executive Branch officials, reported that revenues collected in fiscal year 2003 exceeded the government’s expenses by \$53,000 despite the threats of SARS, the Iraq war and Typhoon Pongsona.

Babauta, in a briefing with reporters later, reiterated that the administration managed to balance the FY03 budget, adding that the government’s revenue source is steady.

“We have a balanced budget this year. The projection shows that by the end of this fiscal year, our revenues are going to go up. Like in any fiscal year, it’s a cyclical turn of events where the revenues dip and then increase. But overall, at the end of the day in the fiscal year, we will see an increase in our revenues,” the governor told reporters.

He said the cumulative unreserved fund balance deficit—totaling \$99.389 million as of FY03—goes way back to the year when the Northern Marianas achieved its Commonwealth status.

In qualifying his definition of a balanced budget, Babuata said the administration did not spend beyond what the Legislature appropriated.

“We stayed within that spending plan and at the end, we spent what we were budgeted for. That’s a balanced budget, notwithstanding the accumulated liabilities and deficit over the years. So what we want to do is maintain a balanced budget every year while addressing how we can retire the liabilities and the deficit that we have incurred over the years,” he said.

Proposed solutions

In its financial report, the Finance Department stressed the need to make

a significant impact in retiring the deficit, which, it said, means making difficult choices over the stability of the retirement system and the level of government services.

“The cumulative deficit significantly impacts the availability of cash for current operations,” cited the agency.

The DoF has put forward several solutions to cut the deficit:

- Suspend rebates;
- Reduce government expenditures;
- Review outdated fees and penalties;
- Privatization of select government functions;
- Proper budget allocations;
- Review water/sewer rate for government;
- Revisit the administration’s Integrated Fiscal Plan;
- Review/reconsider earmarking provisions, such as the sin tax;
- All additional revenues realized must be dedicated to deficit reduction;
- Continue retirement system reforms to maintain stability of the system;
- Leverage Compact Impact funds to retire the deficit;

Babauta said it is the goal of the Blue Ribbon Committee to take a look at the proposed solutions in order to clear the government’s longstanding liabilities.

“If we do that, if we clear our liabilities, our deficit this year, I tell you, this would be one or two entities in the entire nation—among all the 50 states and the territories—that will have no deficit and that we would be staying within our spending plan. A balanced budget every year. What that would do is it’s going to increase our credit rating, our ability to go out and borrow money. If we don’t have a deficit, we will have a strong financial standing and we can borrow money at very low interest because we don’t have liabilities,” said the governor.

I-CONNECT

From Page 1

tore through I-Connect radio room, destroying the firm’s communications equipment, including those of the FBI and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

The blast initially downed I-Connect’s analog service and affected its digital service on the eastern portion of Saipan.

Andaya said yesterday that, while I-Connect has restored these services Wednesday night, its radio units have no signal on the southern portion of Saipan due to upgrade work.

The FBI has ruled out terrorism as motive behind the explosion, although it maintained that the blast was intentional. It has yet to disclose any suspect and the motive behind the incident.

The FBI, together with the CNMI Crime Stoppers and I-Connect, pooled together a \$16,000-reward to anyone who could give vital information leading to the arrest of the culprits.

The FBI and the Department of Public Safety is urging those who might have information about the culprits to call the FBI’s Saipan office at 322-6934 or the CNMI Crime Stoppers’ Hotline at 234-7272.

PAGAN

From Page 1

Rock Quarry] it would appear that violation, in fact, occurred and that at the very least a review and determination is appropriate,” the governor said in a Feb. 10 letter to MPLA commissioner Henry S. Hofschneider.

Babauta said he reviewed the firm’s permit upon a petition by Northern Islands Mayor Valentin Taisakan, who had earlier asked the MPLA to immediately terminate the quarry firm’s permit to undertake activities on Pagan.

“He asked me to look into the existing commercial mining permit. He believes that the permit, by virtue of its specific terms, was terminated long ago. I have reviewed it and my findings are consistent with the mayor’s findings that [J.G. Sablan Rock Quarry] has violated the terms and conditions as stipulated in the permit,” said Babauta.

The governor said that MPLA should act on the issue immediately considering what he said is a “great demand” for Pagan’s rare pozzolan ash deposits.

Mt. Pagan’s fine ashes, commonly known as pozzolan, are said to be marketable because they are of high natural quality and could be found in

only three locations in the world: Italy, Greece, and Northern Islands.

Latest estimate showed that Mt. Pagan ashes amount to some 200 million tons.

Numerous test reports confirmed that the whole deposit “is of uniformly high quality, contains no carbon and virtually no sulfur trioxide, and is free from any contamination.”

“Pozzolan, I believe, is in great demand throughout the Pacific Rim, particularly China, and the U.S. as an additive to cement. With such great demand for a natural resource in such abundance in our own backyard, the question that comes to mind is why have we not taken advantage of this immense opportunity?” Babauta asked MPLA.

Taisakan had informed the MPLA that a Japanese investor wants to extract the volcano’s high quality ashes but J.G. Sablan’s existing permit poses a great concern.

“I am very uncomfortable discussing with foreign investors the Pagan pozzolan mining opportunities while the permit with J.G. Sablan is still active,” Taisakan had said.

As well, he said the permit clearance is necessary as his office aims to seek federal assistance from the Department of the Interior for the conduct of a economic feasibility study of the pozzolan and basalt on Pagan.

Palacios seeks to expedite scholarship board creation

By MARIAN A. MARAYA
REPORTER

With the enactment of the Saipan Higher Educational Assistance Act, its main proponent, House Rep. Arnold I. Palacios, estimates a period between six to nine months to get the scholarship program up and running.

Saipan Local Law 13-21, signed by Gov. Juan N. Babauta this week, establishes the Saipan and Northern Islands Municipal Scholarship Board.

Palacios said the Saipan and Northern Islands Legislative Delegation is communicating with the Office of the Saipan Mayor to expedite the submission of nominees who will eventually comprise the board membership.

The legislator has volunteered his personal time to see to it that the scholarship program is implemented in time for the next fall semester, at the latest.

“I have talked to a lot of very interested individuals willing to help—local attorneys, businessmen and women, [and] retired professionals. They have high hopes for this program,” Palacios said yesterday.

Babauta, in signing House Local Bill 13-48 into law,

MVA and GVB to promote NMI at RP Travel Tour Expo

The Marianas Visitors Authority is gearing up for the 11th Travel Tour Expo slated for Feb. 6-8, 2004 in Mandaluyong City, Philippines. The expo is organized by the Philippine Travel Agencies Association, the largest travel association in the country.

Deemed to be the largest and most prestigious travel trade show in the Philippines, the event was organized to encourage unity in the travel industry and to promote the interests of its members and the traveling public.

The MVA, in partnership with the Guam Visitors Bureau, will be sharing booth space at this year’s expo, where they will showcase the attractiveness of the CNMI and Guam to business and leisure travelers. The MVA delegation includes Directors JM Guerrero and Edward Maratita, Public relations & Community programs Manager Martin Duenas, and Marketing assistant Brenda Repeki.

“Our participation at this expo is necessary to further boost travel and tourism from this market, especially now that we have the airline service coming in directly from Manila. It is important that MVA begins to develop this market and also tap into it. The MVA and the GVB is working together to promote the Marianas and see the potential from the Philippine market,” says Jonas Ogren, MVA managing director.

recommended that SNILD amend the bill to allow for the appointment of members with staggered terms in order to ensure better continuity of the scholarship program.

In response, Palacios assured that the SNILD is amenable to this. “It’s not a problem. That was an oversight on our part,” the minority representative admitted. He

added that the SNILD will soon be drafting the amendment to this effect.

The lawmaker said the toughest part of the process is coming out with the rules and regulations on how to run the scholarship program. He,



Palacios

however, expressed optimism that this can be accomplished in less than a year with aid of volunteers.

The scholarship assistance program mainly depends on a continuing appropriation of \$1.2 million from a separate local law, SLL

13-8, which generates funds through poker and pachinko machine license fees.

Palacios stressed that this is not the sole source of funds being looked at, citing other avenues that may be tapped to fuel the scholarship fund.

“We can look at different endowments and foundations, even the federal government. We

could set up a loan with the MPLT. There are a lot of opportunities out there once the board gets organized,” the congressman explained.

The new law establishes the scholarship board within the Office of the Saipan Mayor, whose task is to appoint five members subject to the advice and consent of the SNILD.

microl spin
+red

guangdong

gorman

What parents can do to prevent baby bottle decay

By LORI I. DEMAINE BS, RDH
FOR THE SAIPAN TRIBUNE

Sometimes parents are not aware that baby’s teeth can get decay (cavities) as soon as they appear in the mouth. By the time the decay is noticed, it may be too late to save the child’s teeth. Decay in infants and very young children is known as Baby Bottle Tooth Decay (BBTD).

The good news is that it can be prevented very easily.

Baby bottle decay is a dental condition that can destroy the teeth of an infant or young child. It happens

when a child’s teeth are exposed to liquids that contain sugar for long periods. Such examples are milk (including breast milk), formula, fruit juice and other sweetened liquids.

Not all teeth are as likely to develop Baby Bottle decay. The teeth most likely to be damaged are the upper front teeth, but other teeth can be damaged, too. Your child’s first set of teeth-the “baby” teeth-are very important in helping your child chew food easily, learn to speak clearly, and look attractive. Decay in primary teeth can affect your child’s erupting permanent teeth, cause pain,

and can be associated with general health problems in some children. So taking care of the baby teeth is just as important as taking care of the permanent teeth.

The reason why teeth decay is due to the invisible sticky film called plaque. Bacteria in plaque use sugar to produce acids. These acids then attack tooth enamel. If sugary liquid is allowed to remain in the mouth, the bacteria have more time to produce acids that can attack the teeth. Tooth decay can then occur after frequent exposure to acid attacks. It is not just what children drink,

but how often and for how long their teeth are exposed to decay-causing acids. That is why frequently offering your child a bottle containing sugary liquid as a pacifier-or allowing your child to fall asleep with a bottle during naps or at night-can do harm to the teeth. During sleep the flow of saliva decreases, allowing the sweetened liquids from the bottle to pool around the child’s teeth for long periods. This can greatly increase your child’s risk of decay.

Lori DeMaine is a dental hygienist who works with Saipan's SDA dental clinic, on increasing dental health awareness throughout the CNMI.

Bank of Hawaii announces new appointments for West Pacific

Bank of Hawaii announced the following appointments for the company’s West Pacific operations: John Sheather, senior vice president, has been appointed Corporate Banking manager for Pacific Islands Division.

In his new role, Sheather is responsible for the development and implementation of long-term strategies and the delivery of Bank of Hawaii products and services for commercial and small business clients within the Pacific region.

Prior to assuming his new position, Sheather was the country manager for the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands and was based in Saipan. Sheather joined Bank of Hawaii in 1997 as vice president and country manager of Bank of Hawaii’s Papua New Guinea branches.

Before joining the bank, he held several leadership positions in various organizations, including Indosuez

Niugini Bank, Ltd.; Indoniu Finance Company, Ltd.; and Carpenters Fiji, Ltd., all based in the South and West Pacific.

Sheather replaces vice president Mark H. Tokito, who will assume his new position in February as vice president and dealer commercial banking officer in Honolulu. Tokito, who joined the bank in 1985, has held various positions within the West Pacific region for the past seven years.

Tokito holds a bachelor of business administration degree in finance from the University of Hawaii at Manoa. He has held officer and director positions with the Rotary Club of Tumon Bay in Guam, Saipan Chamber of Commerce and the Northern Marianas College Business Incubator and was a member of the Rotary Club of Hawaii Kai.

Stephen A. Brock was appointed vice president and country manager for the bank’s operations in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.

In this position, he will oversee the development and implementation of long-term strategies and the delivery of Bank of Hawaii products and services within CNMI.

Previously, Brock served as vice president and Palau country manager and was based at the bank’s Koror Branch. Prior to that, he was an assistant vice president and private banking relationship manager on the island of Kauai after joining the bank in 1997.

Brock holds a bachelor of business administration degree in finance from the University of North Texas and Series 7 and 63 licenses under the NASD. He serves as treasurer of the Palau Rotary Club.

James “Hobbs” M. Lowson has been named vice president and country manager for Bank of Hawaii operations in the Republic of Palau. In his new position, Hobbs will be responsible for the Bank of Hawaii’s operations in Palau, including sales and the delivery of the

bank’s products. Lowson joined Bank of Hawaii in 1996 and most recently served as assistant vice president and business banking manager in CNMI.

He holds an executive MBA, a master’s degree in business administration and a bachelor’s degree in political science from the University of Hawaii at Manoa. He is an active member of the Rotary Club of Saipan. “These new assignments are important to our banking operations in the West Pacific,” said Ron Leach, executive vice president and Pacific Islands Division manager. “Under the leadership of these seasoned managers, we will continue to build our business in these markets and provide the highest level of service to island residents and businesses.”

Founded in 1897, Bank of Hawaii Corporation is a regional financial services company serving businesses, consumers and governments in Hawaii, the West Pacific and American Samoa.

CNMI donates \$50K to American Samoa

The CNMI has donated \$50,000 to American Samoa to assist in its recovery efforts in the wake of Tropical Cyclone Heta.

In a recent letter to Gov. Juan N. Babauta, American Samoa governor Togiola T.A. Tulafono said the money would be used for a much-needed ambulance.

He said that several of their government emergency vehicles were severely damaged during the cyclone. He said the CNMI’s help will go a long way.

“On behalf of the people of American Samoa, I wish to thank you and the good citizens of the CNMI for assisting in our recovery program,” said Tulafono.

This even as the American Red Cross-NMI Chapter recently donated \$5,000 to the relief efforts.

The NMI chapter also deployed disaster specialists to American Samoa.

Reports said that Cyclone Heta completely destroyed over 600 homes and over 1,000 others were severely damaged. *(Liberty Dones)*

Sinapalo school community carnival

Sinapalo Elementary School will be having a Family Night Carnival and everyone is invited. The event will be on Friday, Feb. 20, 2004, from 5pm to 8pm at the school grounds. There will be games, food, and lots of fun to share with the whole family. The office will sell tickets for the games on the carnival day.

dial rent

McPhetres to discuss stateless citizenship in the Commonwealth

The Society for Human Resources Management has invited Northern Marianas College instructor Sam McPhetres to speak at the monthly SHRM meeting at the Hyatt Regency Saipan on February 19, 2004, from 11:30am to 1:15pm.

McPhetres will speak about stateless citizens—those who were born in the Northern Marianas by parents who were legal aliens between 1978 and 1986, the transition period of the Covenant agreement signed in 1978 and the conferment of Presidential Proclamation No. 5564 by President Ronald Reagan in 1986.

Randy Mendoza, a stateless

citizen himself, will also address the issue. It is estimated that the Commonwealth has approximately 300 individuals with stateless citizenship status.

Non-members in the business community—whether owners, managers or human resource professionals—are invited to learn more about the Society and improve their human resource knowledge through the presentation and discussion.

The CNMI Chapter of the Society for Human Resource Management is the Commonwealth’s foremost professional forum for discussion and training in Human Resource matters.

Recognized as a Superior Merit Chapter, the CNMI branch

is composed of human resource professionals from a variety of industries, large and small, who recognize a need for a local society for professionals from a variety of industries, large and small, who recognize a need for a local society for professionals in the human resources field. The CNMI Chapter is affiliated with the national organization.

The meeting will be \$15 for SHRM members and \$20 for non-SHRM members. Lunch is included in the cost. Seating is limited; therefore members and others interested in attending this meeting should contact Kim or Gil at 234-1234 ext. 5402/5415 or send reservations via fax at 233-0182.

When leaving a job gets complicated

By KENNETH BREDEMEIER
THE WASHINGTON POST

On its face, leaving a job ought to be simple enough. You give notice, and later walk out the door. But it can be much more complicated.

Q. “I’ve recently finished graduate school, and had about three years of professional experience under my belt prior to grad school. But I recently resigned from a new position, with strong ‘encouragement’ from my supervisor to do so, after a few months on the job. Do I put this on my resume, and if yes, how do I answer questions about such short-term employment? The problem is that the work I did there is very reflective of the kind of work I want to find and really highlights my skills.”

A. Karen Usher, president and chief executive of TPO Inc., a McLean, VA., human resources outsourcing firm, said she not only does not see a problem in listing the short-lived job on a resume, but thinks it wise to do so.

To omit the job, Usher said, the worker “runs the risk of raising more questions than not if it’s discovered. Then it makes it look worse than what really happened.

“You don’t explain on a resume what happened,” she said, “but rather in an interview,” and even then not in excruciating detail. “You say, ‘It looked like a good fit when I got that job. It wasn’t.”

“Be very professional about it,” she said. “Say, ‘Here’s the reason we agreed to part.’ Even having two of those (short-lived jobs) on your resume over a long career is not a problem. There are lots of reasons today why people

have short stints on their resumes.”

Despite the conflict with the boss, Usher said this worker can offer to provide references from that job, although Usher said, “Don’t provide buddies. Give a substantial reference from another manager, one involved with a project you worked on, someone with knowledge of your work.”

Usher said that if a worker is asked why she is leaving a job, she can simply say, “I’ve got a better opportunity.”

cellular pro

church of jesus

pic
+red



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO
Pictured from left are THC executive vice president Jerry Tan, Century Tours & Travel president Dave Sablan, and Saipan Chamber of Commerce president Alex Sablan.

Saipan Chamber recognizes local travel firm

The Saipan Chamber of Commerce recognized Century Travel & Tours president David M. Sablan and Tan Holdings Corporation executive vice president Jerry Tan at the business group’s general membership meeting this week for the company’s efforts in helping open up the China tourism market for the Northern Marianas.

Chamber president Alex Sablan thanked THC and Century Tours and Travel for helping open the CNMI to Chinese travelers by chartering

direct China Eastern Airlines flights from Shanghai to Saipan during the recent Lunar New Year traditional holiday period.

Tan, in his remarks, said: “We’ve studied the China market and it offers huge potential for our islands’ tourism industry. Last year there were 20 million outbound tourists from China, which even surpassed Japan, and these tourists do a lot of spending when they go abroad.”

Tan added that Hong Kong and other markets that get a lot of Chinese tourists

are really benefiting from this market, “so we hope we can do it here. We are very glad we were able to bring in these Shanghai-Saipan air charters as part of our company’s efforts to bring more tourists and help the local economy.”

Sablan, meanwhile, recognized the company’s partner in this charter project, Spring International Tours, which has 100 offices throughout China. Sablan mentioned that the company is looking at additional charters out of Shanghai later in the year.

Federal regulators approve new US futures exchange

By DAVE CARPENTER
AP BUSINESS WRITER

Federal regulators signed off Wednesday on a new all-electronic futures exchange, setting the stage for a rivalry between the German- and Swiss-backed Eurex US and the Chicago exchanges that have long dominated the lucrative U.S. futures industry.

Eurex officials issued a statement saying they were “more than delighted” with the 3-0 approval vote by the Commodity Futures Trading Commission in Washington and are on plan to launch the Chicago-headquartered exchange this Sunday.

Eurex US poses a direct threat to the Chicago Board of Trade because it offers many of the same U.S. debt products—two-year, five-year, 10-year and 30-year U.S. Treasury futures and options—and at lower costs. It also will list European interest-rate and stock futures.

Board of Trade officials said they can fend off the challenge because they offer their customers broader choices and a bigger, more efficient marketplace. Bernard Dan, president and CEO, said the 156-year-old exchange is well-positioned to thrive because of “a superior electronic trading platform, an innovative clearing solution ... and the most competitive pricing in the world.”

But wary of the new competition, the Board said this week it will waive or reduce electronic trading fees on

Treasury contracts and introduce electronic trading of German government debt contracts—a key Eurex business.

The Chicago Mercantile Exchange, the largest U.S. futures exchange, also will pay a price for any success by Eurex US because it now shares a common clearing platform with the Board of Trade. That means it will lose clearing volume—the business of validating, delivering and settling transactions—if the new exchange takes market share away from the Board of Trade.

“It’s the opening of a battle for survival as it relates to the Chicago exchanges,” said Allan Zavarro, executive vice president and global head of futures at ABN Amro Bank in New York.

The Merc also faces another competitive challenge from Europe starting March 18 when another large futures exchange, the London-based Euronext-Liffe, begins listing a euro-dollar contract that will go head-to-head against its most popular product.

The new Chicago exchange is a bold foray into the United States market by parent company Eurex, which is the world’s largest derivatives exchange and is headquartered in Frankfurt, Germany. But analysts say Eurex US—known formally as U.S. Futures Exchange LLC—could have a tough time initially in terms of getting enough volume and market share to create liquidity for its contracts, despite its lower costs.

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Fed chairman warns of budget deficit

By JEANNINE AVERSA
AP WRITER

Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan said Wednesday the economy had been showing “impressive gains,” even as he warned that mushrooming federal budget deficits could derail the progress.

Despite Greenspan’s deficit comments, which put him at odds with the Bush administration, he offered an upbeat assessment of the economy and expressed hope companies would step up hiring. Hiring has been painfully slow and has become a political sore spot for President Bush.

The central bank chairman’s twice-a-year economic report to Congress apparently pleased Wall Street. The Dow Jones industrials jumped 123.85 points to close at 10,737.70—the highest level in more than 2 1/2 years.

Greenspan reaffirmed the Fed’s stance that it would be patient in considering possible increases in short-term interest rates, which now are at a 45-year low of 1 percent.

Still, he said low interest rates “will not be compatible indefinitely” with the Fed’s primary job of fighting inflation. Some private economists believe the Fed could start nudging up

rates this year. Others predict rates will not change until 2005.

Greenspan said the economic picture has brightened since summer. The economy grew at an average rate of 6.1 percent in the second half of 2003, the fastest back-to-back quarterly increases since the first two quarters of 1984.

“Overall, the economy has made impressive gains in output and real incomes; however progress in creating jobs has been limited,” he told the committee.

Greenspan held out hopes for improvement as businesses, unable to squeeze more out of existing workers, begin hiring to

meet increased demand.

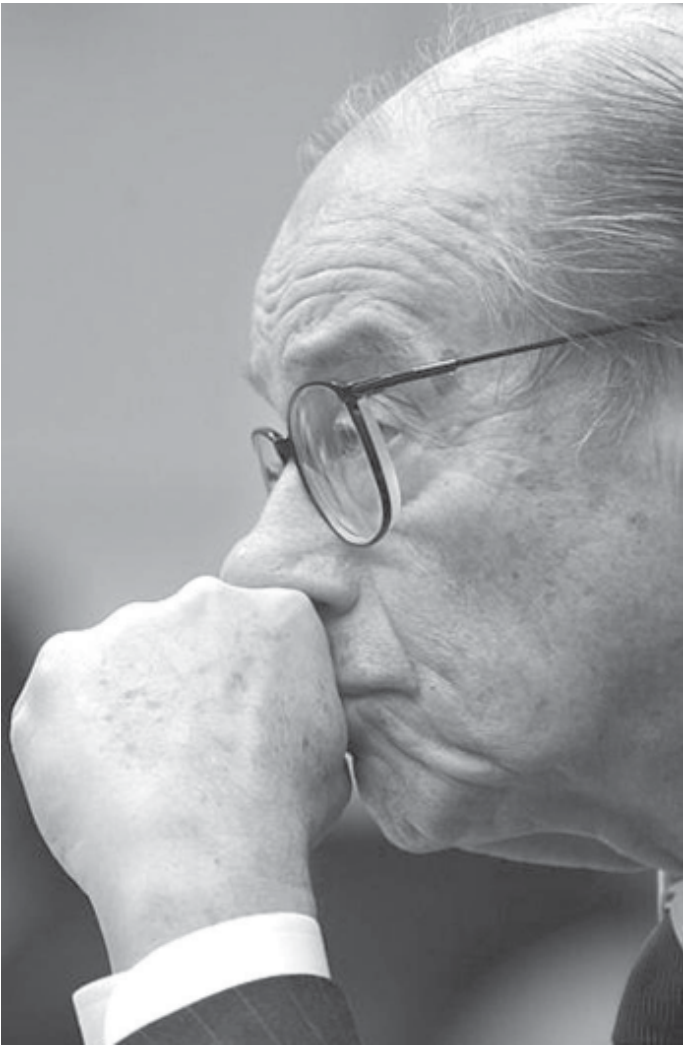
“As managers become more confident in the durability of the expansion, firms will surely once again add to their payrolls,” Greenspan said.

He tempered his optimism with a dose of caution about the dangers of budget deficits.

Last week, the Bush administration projected that this year’s deficit will reach a record \$521 billion.

“Federal budget deficits could cause difficulties even in the relatively near term,” Greenspan told the House Financial Services Committee.

“Should investors become significantly more doubtful that



AP
Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan testifies on Capitol Hill Wednesday, Feb. 11, 2004, before the House Financial Services Committee hearing on monetary policy.

the Congress will take the necessary fiscal measures, an appreciable backup in long-term interest rates is possible,” Greenspan said.

The Bush administration has argued that the deficits pose no immediate threat of pushing interest rates higher.

The administration has pledged to cut the deficit in half over the next five years. Rep. Jay Inslee, D-Wash., said that pledge was a “fantasy.”

The committee chairman, Rep. Michael Oxley, R-Ohio, said the deficits are unavoidable given the challenges the country is facing.

“The alternative would be to stop investing in economic stimulus or to fight against terror on the cheap, and I don’t think the American people would want either of those options,” Oxley said.

Greenspan renewed his support for Congress to reinstate budget rules that had set caps on discretionary spending and required Congress to offset any new tax cuts or spending increases so the deficit would not increase.

He said that unless the government gets its financial house in order, the situation will grow more dire with the impending retirement of 77 million baby boomers.

“Without corrective action, this development will put substantial pressure on our ability in coming years to provide even minimal government services while maintaining entitlement benefits

at their current level without debilitating increases in tax rates,” he said.

Committee Democrats pushed Greenspan to explain why 2.2 million jobs have been lost since Bush took office in January 2001, even with three successive tax cuts that the administration claimed would boost job growth. The Fed chief also was asked about the administration’s forecast that 2.6 million jobs would be created this year.

For Americans out of work, it does not feel like an economic recovery. “The economy continues to perform extraordinarily poorly for people without jobs,” said Rep. Carolyn Maloney, D-N.Y.

Greenspan said forecasts about job creation have been wrong in recent years because companies have been able to produce more with fewer workers. But he said productivity is likely to slow this year, triggering a rebound in job growth. He called the administration’s prediction on jobs “a credible forecast” if productivity growth does slow down.

The Fed’s economic forecast predicted that the unemployment rate, which dropped in January to 5.6 percent, would improve slightly, edging down to somewhere between 5.25 percent and 5.5 percent by the fourth quarter.

The Fed forecast that the overall economy will grow by between 4.5 percent and 5 percent in 2004—better than its forecast in July and up from a 4.3 percent increase for all of 2003.

triathlon

SEC proposes ban on fund-broker payments

By MARCY GORDON
AP BUSINESS WRITER

Federal regulators are moving closer to banning payments by mutual fund companies to induce brokers to sell certain funds—a practice that critics say creates conflicts of interest and hurts investors.

The Securities and Exchange Commission also voted Wednesday to adopt new rules requiring funds to provide investors a twice-yearly “shareholder report” with fuller information on fees and expenses. The report will include

the dollar amount of fund expenses paid by shareholders on a \$1,000 investment.

The SEC, which has been making a series of changes in rules governing the mutual fund industry, is promising that dramatic reforms protecting investors from abuses will be in place by early summer.

The agency has been under pressure from investor advocates and lawmakers who are pushing legislation to overhaul the fund industry amid growing evidence that ordinary shareholders are hurt by trading and marketing abuses.

Toymakers, Wal-Mart battle over toy prices

By ANNE D'INNOCENZIO
AP BUSINESS WRITER

Led by Wal-Mart Stores Inc., discount retailers won a war with other toy stores this past holiday season. Now toymakers, a casualty in that bitter fight, have decided to make their own stand.

To protect themselves and toy retailers they see as key to their profits, some manufacturers plan to deliver fewer hot toys to Wal-Mart and to have more exclusive launches at chains like Toys “R” Us Inc. It’s a rare instance of manufacturers challenging the biggest U.S. retail juggernaut and its low-price approach to business.

Wild Planet Toys’ Aquapets, an interactive critter, will be at Toys “R” Us exclusively for three months this spring before it reaches the mass merchants.

“The success of Toys ‘R’ Us is important for the health of the toy industry,” said Danny Grossman, founder and CEO of Wild Planet.

Said Jim Silver, publisher of the Toy Book, an industry magazine: “Wal-Mart is a very important part of the toy business, but toymakers don’t want its low-pricing strategies to devalue their brands and their business—and put more toy retailers out of business.”

The price wars contributed to the bankruptcies last holiday season of FAO Inc., owner of the famed FAO Schwarz, and KB Toys Inc., which plans to close nearly a third of its stores.

“Whether it is exclusive launches or controlled product shipments, they are going to do whatever they can to keep other retailers healthy,” Silver said.

Still, given the clout of Wal-Mart, which has a 21 percent share of the toy market, it remains to be seen whether these strategies will be effective. Many manufacturers—who wanted to speak anonymously for fear of losing the discounter’s business—said there is only so much they can do. Setting prices with retailers is illegal under antitrust laws.

And Karen Burk, a Wal-Mart spokeswoman, said: “Our focus will continue to be what it has always been, and that is delivering value to our customers, and that will not change.”

The pricing issue is expected to be a key concern of manufacturers and retailers at the American International Toy Fair, the industry product expo that officially begins Sunday.

Toy price wars have always been part of the holiday season, but 2003 was even more brutal than expected. In September, Wal-Mart started by dramatically reducing prices on more than a dozen hot toys, six weeks earlier than usual.

The retailer sold Mattel’s Hot Wheels T-Wrecks playset for \$29.74 instead of the original \$49.88, while the price of Play Along’s Sing-Along Care Bears fell to \$14.99 from \$24.99.

Wal-Mart used the toys as a loss leader to woo shoppers to other aisles elsewhere in the store.

Discount rivals including Target Corp. followed, but other stores that could not compete ended up canceling orders and advertisements.

Manufacturers see several concerns about Wal-Mart’s pricing on the toy business: its deep discounting makes toys unprofitable for other retailers, who are likely to order fewer products. They also fret Wal-Mart’s strategy forces more traditional toy stores to close. Plus, toys may become a devalued product—permanently lowering margins and making toys that are never discounted seem far more expensive to shoppers.

That’s why manufacturers are worried about 2004. “This sets the bar this year,” moaned Jay Foreman, CEO of Play Along.

The \$20 billion traditional toy industry suffered a 3 percent decline in sales last year, according to analyst estimates. Meanwhile, prices fell 4.3 percent on top of a 9.3 percent decline in 2002, according to the Labor Department.

“It has become painfully clear that the practice of directing ... (fund money) to a broker or dealer as compensation for distribution of the fund’s shares presents opportunities for abuse” in recent years, SEC Chairman William Donaldson said.

The practice is all the more troubling, he said, “because its impact is hidden from investors.”

Underscoring the proposal’s far-reaching impact, Donaldson said: “This one is going to hit them where it hurts.”

The proposal will be submitted for public comment for 60 days and likely adopted by the agency sometime afterward.

The new disclosure will “enable investors to determine the amount of fees they paid on an ongoing basis, as well as to

compare the amount of fees charged by other funds,” said Paul Royce, head of the SEC division that oversees the mutual fund industry.

An annual fee as low as 1 percent can cut an investor’s returns by 18 percent over 20 years, noted Commissioner Paul Atkins.

Also under the new rules, fund companies will be required to give investors more information every quarter about the stocks that the funds invest in.

New legislation by several senators also would outlaw the practice of fund incentive payments to brokers and other industry practices, significantly changing the way mutual fund companies conduct business with investors and the brokers who sell them funds.

The SEC move goes beyond a recent agency proposal to require fund companies to disclose such special arrangements to investors. An investigation by the agency found the practice was rampant in the mutual fund industry and frequently undisclosed.

Investors can be hurt by the practice by being pushed into buying higher-cost or more poorly performing funds because brokers are rewarded for doing so, not because the funds are suitable for the investors.

The proposed ban on incentive payments to brokers is one of the most radical proposals advanced to date affecting Wall Street investment houses and the mutual fund industry.

The funds have been

ensnared in a scandal since revelations in September of trading practices that favor some big investors to the detriment of ordinary shareholders. Since then, top executives of several big fund companies have been charged; dozens of companies are under investigation.

The SEC is portraying the move as part of a major rule-making effort meant to rebuild confidence in the fund industry among the 95 million Americans—half of all households—who entrust some \$7 trillion to it.

The Investment Company Institute, the fund industry’s lobby group, supports the SEC proposal. Wall Street’s chief lobbying group, the Securities Industry Association, hasn’t yet taken a position on it.

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Stewart jury hears tape of SEC interview

By ERIN McCLAM
AP WRITER

Jurors in the Martha Stewart trial listened for more than an hour Wednesday to a recording in which her stockbroker recounted to investigators his version of why the domestic entrepreneur sold ImClone Systems stock.

Jurors donned wireless headphones to listen to the interview of broker Peter Bacanovic by the Securities and Exchange Commission on Feb. 13, 2002.

On the tape, Bacanovic denies any advance knowledge of the bad news that sent ImClone plummeting just after Stewart sold on Dec. 27, 2001.

He describes a conversation a week before the sale in which he asked Stewart: "How low does this have to go before

you're prepared to part with it?" He said Stewart didn't know, so he suggested \$60 per share.

The prosecution, which introduced the tape, contends the \$60 story is a lie. Bacanovic's assistant testified earlier that the broker ordered him to alert Stewart on the day of the sale that the family of ImClone CEO Sam Waksal was selling.

Earlier Wednesday, Stewart's lawyer Robert Morvillo tried to show that SEC enforcement lawyer Helene Glotzer gave biased testimony because she has a rooting interest for the government.

Morvillo also tried to draw out details of Glotzer's close work with the federal prosecutors handling the case. The SEC, prosecutors and the FBI routinely conduct joint white-collar investigations.

"Is it your hope that the government wins this case?" Morvillo asked.

"Yes," Glotzer said. "I believe in the case." But she stressed she was a "fact witness" who had no bias in her testimony.

Prosecutors have placed Glotzer on the stand in hopes of laying the foundation for what they say are repeated lies by Stewart in 2002 about why she sold the 3,928 shares of ImClone stock.

Stewart told the SEC in 2002 that she did not remember being tipped that ImClone CEO Sam Waksal was trying to dump his shares on the same day that she did, according to Glotzer's testimony.

Stewart also claimed in two SEC interviews that stockbroker Peter Bacanovic handled her sale of ImClone that day. It was



Stewart

actually Bacanovic's assistant, Douglas Faneuil, who took the order.

Under questioning from Morvillo, Glotzer said the SEC had not provided Stewart a form before a February 2002 interview that advises interviewees that lying to the agency is a crime.

But under questioning from prosecutor Michael Schachter, Glotzer said SEC routinely does not provide the form when it conducts joint interviews with prosecutors. And she said Stewart was clear on what the agency expected.

"She was advised to be truthful, and that she could speak to her counsel at any time," Glotzer said.

The day after Stewart dumped ImClone, the company announced disappointing news about a cancer drug that sent the stock on a quick 18-percent decline. Waksal later admitted having insider knowledge of the news.

Judge nixes challenge to Halliburton deal

By CHARLES SHEEHAN
AP WRITER

A federal bankruptcy judge dismissed all claims by insurance companies in the Halliburton Co. asbestos settlement case on Wednesday, saying they had no standing to challenge the agreement.

U.S. Bankruptcy Judge Judith Fitzgerald ruled that because Halliburton and its subsidiaries would be making direct payments to the victims, "insurers are not affected directly or indirectly" and cannot intervene.

Halliburton, the Houston-based oil services and construction conglomerate, last month filed a pre-negotiated bankruptcy petition in Pittsburgh for eight subsidiaries to settle about 400,000 asbestos and 21,000 silica claims for \$4.17 billion in cash and stock. If approved, the deal would settle all current and future asbestos claims against the company once run by Vice President Dick Cheney.

More than 20 insurance companies objected, saying the primary reason more than 98 percent of the lawsuit creditors favor the plan is because Halliburton will pay \$2.78 billion, or nearly \$7,000 in cash to settle each current claim. Historically, asbestos claims settle for about \$920 each, the insurers said.

Insurers sought to derail the settlement, fearing Halliburton or its subsidiaries would file insurance claims at a later date.

In her ruling Wednesday, Fitzgerald said that policies written by the insurance companies would determine whether or not Halliburton could file claims, and those arguments were for another court to hear.

"(Insurers) are not being asked or compelled to do anything right now," Fitzgerald said.

The insurers claimed Halliburton misused bankruptcy laws to get a leg up on the asbestos claims and that its subsidiaries shouldn't qualify for Chapter 11 protection, which is meant to help financially distressed companies pay off debts.

That argument was dismissed because the insurance companies are not creditors, and have no standing to make the claim.

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Nation

Teams search Capitol mail for ricin

By ALAN FRAM
AP WRITER

WASHINGTON (AP)—A Senate rattled by a ricin attack began returning to normalcy Wednesday, and the lack of any reported illnesses prompted leaders to plan to reopen shuttered office buildings.

As lawmakers awaited the results of tests measuring the potency of the powdery poison, officials said none of the several dozen workers who were potentially exposed seemed ill. Senators voted—for the first time this week—on a judgeship nomination, and at least three Senate committees held hearings, though they borrowed rooms in House office buildings to do so.

“Everybody’s doing great,” Frist told reporters. “We’re outside the window where you’d expect to see symptoms at all, and it seems well contained.”

Bowing to growing complaints, Senate leaders were even letting senators and aides briefly re-enter their offices to remove needed documents and equipment. That included the very fourth-floor corridor in the Dirksen Senate office building where the deadly toxin was discovered Monday in the mailroom of Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist, R-Tenn.

“It’s completely normal in there,” said Laurie Schultz Heim, an aide to Sen. James Jeffords, I-Vt., who said she spent less than 10 minutes removing items from his offices, which are next to Frist’s.

She said she had worn no protective clothes and noticed nothing unusual other than two machines in the hallway that seemed to be filtering air.

Inmate executed for 1985 murder

STARKE, Fla. (AP)—After a short delay caused by the Supreme Court, a man was executed Wednesday evening for the 1985 murder of a woman who was raped and shot in a cemetery.

Johnny L. Robinson, 51, was condemned for the slaying of Beverly St. George, whose car had broken down in St. Johns County in northeastern Florida.

He was originally scheduled to die by injection at 6 p.m. at Florida State Prison, but 15 minutes before the process was to begin the Supreme Court asked the state “to wait for further word.”

Shortly after 7 p.m., the nation’s high court voted 5-4 to deny all appeal issues, including that Robinson’s sentence was the result of racism against blacks, that a co-defendant had recanted testimony against him, and that Florida’s method



AP
This undated image released by the Federal Bureau of Investigation shows a small metal vial of ricin found in a threatening letter addressed to the Transportation Department discovered at a U.S. Postal facility in Greenville, S.C., on October 15, 2003. The vial was contained in a letter warning that more ricin would be used unless new federal trucking regulations were scrapped. Investigators are trying to determine if the same person or persons sent ricin-laced mail to the Washington office of Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist, R-Tenn., found on Monday, Feb. 2, 2004.

Among those expressing irritation was Sen. Arlen Specter, R-Pa.

He said he is “livid” about how “one terrorist spreading rat poison can bring the government to half mast.”

Yet with the entire Capitol complex subject to continuous air sampling and all congressional mail being collected and examined, no one was willing to say the threat was over.

“You never know in the next hour what you will find,” Frist said.

Although ricin inhaled or injected can kill quickly, the incident—so far—seemed to be causing less tension than the anthrax letters sent to Capitol Hill in October 2001. Lawmakers and aides said that was because being

targeted by a biochemical substance is no longer novel for Congress, and because initial indications were t hat the ricin hadn’t spread into the air.

“There isn’t quite the same sense of anxiety,” said Senate Minority Leader Tom Daschle, D-S.D., whose office was hit by the first anthrax attack.

The FBI and 100 Marines from the corps’ Chemical Biological Incident Response Force were investigating.

Among other things, investigators were seeking a link Wednesday between the ricin in Frist’s office and ricin-laden letters found last fall in mail facilities serving the White

House and the Greenville-Spartanburg International Airport in South Carolina.

So far, they said, they had found no such connection. They also said they had yet to find precisely how the ricin had made it to Frist’s mailroom, said U.S. Capitol police chief Terrance Gainer.

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Dow closes up 124, hits 2 1/2-year high

By MICHAEL J. MARTINEZ
AP BUSINESS WRITER

Investors anxious to get back into the stock market jumped on Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan's bullish economic report Wednesday, sending stocks soaring and propelling the Dow Jones industrial average up 124 points to its highest level in more than 2 1/2 years.

Greenspan, in testimony before a House committee, gave a better-than-expected assessment of inflation and the overall economy and reiterated the Fed's current stance that it could remain patient before eventually raising interest rates.

Investors, having sat on the sidelines for weeks amid uncertainty about the economy, responded to Greenspan with a wave of buying. The Dow Jones industrial average gained 123.85, or 1.2 percent, to 10,737.70. It was the highest the Dow has been since June 13, 2001, and is less than 1,000 points shy of the index's record close of 11,722.98, set Jan. 14, 2000.

Broader stock indicators also rose sharply. The Standard & Poor's 500 index was up 12.22, or 1.1 percent, at 1,157.76. The Nasdaq composite index climbed 14.33, or 0.7 percent, to 2,089.66.

Stocks drew the most momentum from the Fed's lowered

inflation estimate, which fell by 0.25 percentage point from its projection of last July.

"That in particular tells me that the Fed is not really concerned about inflation," said Jeff Kleintop, chief investment strategist for PNC Financial Services Group. "I think it's positive for stocks in that it will keep rates low for a longer period of time."

While Greenspan stated that interest rates would eventually have to rise to combat inflation, investors were apparently satisfied when he did not give a timetable for a rate hike. They also ignored his warning that increasing federal budget deficits could hurt the economy.

"This rise is all about Greenspan," said Scott Wren, equity strategist for A.G. Edwards & Sons. "This is basically all good news, and the market needed to hear it."

The Fed chairman also said the GDP is now expected to grow between 4.5 percent and 5 percent in 2004, up from a July forecast of 3.75 percent to 4.75 percent. Investors interpreted the revision as a sign that corporate profits will also grow at a stronger rate this year.

As investors returned to the market, volume was much heavier than the average for the past few weeks, which saw

uneven, directionless trading punctuated by single days of sharp movements based on the latest news.

Wall Street was also digesting a surprise \$54 billion bid by cable company Comcast Corp. for The Walt Disney Co. The entertainment giant's embattled chief executive, Michael Eisner, spurned a private offer from the cable company, which has now taken its bid public in hopes of gaining shareholder support.

The Disney takeover bid, in which Comcast is offering 0.78 shares of its stock for every share of Disney, is seen by many investors and analysts as another sign of broad economic recovery.

"It's nice to see mergers and takeovers happening again," said Todd Leone, managing director of equity trading at SG Cowen Securities. "There's money out there being put to work, and that's a good thing."

Comcast also beat earnings estimates by 14 cents per share, but had its rating cut to "neutral" by two investment houses. Another analyst questioned whether Comcast's offer for Disney was too low. Comcast dropped \$2.70 to \$31.23.

Disney, which released its earnings ahead of schedule on the merger news and easily beat expectations by 10 cents a share,

jumped \$3.52, or 15 percent, to \$27.60. An estimated 107 million shares of Disney, a Dow component, traded hands during Wednesday's regular session, far above its daily average of 8 million.

Insurer American International Group Inc. posted a profit of \$1.03 per share for the fourth quarter after suffering a loss the year before. AIG rose 85 cents to \$74.35.

Prudential Financial Inc.,

which announced profits late Tuesday that beat estimates by 3 cents, gained \$1.70 to \$46.70.

Online job service Monster Worldwide Inc. slid \$1.23 to \$24.40 after posting earnings that beat Wall Street expectations by 1 cent a share.

Advancing issues outnumbered decliners by nearly 2 to 1 at the New York Stock Exchange, where consolidated volume came to 2.24 billion

shares, compared to 1.79 billion at the same point Tuesday.

The Russell 2000 index of smaller companies was up 4.24, or 0.7 percent, at 597.07.

Overseas, Japan's stock exchange was closed for a national holiday. In Europe, Britain's FTSE 100 finished down 0.2 percent, France's CAC-40 finished 0.3 percent higher, and Germany's DAX index rose 0.3 percent.

Coca-Cola's 4Q profit slips slightly

The Coca-Cola Co.'s profit slipped in the fourth quarter despite an 8 percent rise in sales and evidence the world's largest beverage maker is improving its relationship with its bottlers and its efficiency with a smaller work force.

The results, announced Wednesday, beat Wall Street's earnings expectations by a penny a share.

Atlanta-based Coke said that for the three months ending Dec. 31, it earned \$927 million, or 38 cents a share, compared to \$930 million, or 38 cents a share, in the year-ago period.

Excluding one-time items related to streamlining initiatives, Coke said it earned \$1.13 billion, or 46 cents a share. On that basis, analysts surveyed by Thomson

First Call were expecting earnings of 45 cents a share.

Revenue in the October-December period was \$5.18 billion, compared to \$4.80 billion in the same three-month period a year earlier.

Coke said it has been helped by its strategy in recent years to focus on its core brands and improve its relationship with its bottlers.

"Our system is absolutely unbeatable when we are aligned with our bottling partners. Well, we are aligned," chief executive Doug Daft told investors in a conference call Wednesday.

The earnings news comes as Coke faces an investigation by federal prosecutors and the Securities and Exchange Commission related to allegations

made by a former employee turned whistleblower.

Late Tuesday, Lancer Corp. of San Antonio notified the SEC that its former auditor KPMG believes that the company likely committed an illegal act by telling investors its internal investigation showed no evidence of wrongdoing related to its booking of revenue from equipment sales to Coke's fountain division.

In an earlier letter to Lancer, KPMG had not specified what illegal acts it believes Lancer committed. KPMG has since quit as the independent auditor of Lancer's books and has said it plans to withdraw three years' worth of audit opinions. **(AP)**

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Young inmates in Calif. being caged, drugged

By DON THOMPSON
AP WRITER

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP)—Young California inmates are often locked in cages as punishment, and those with mental problems are frequently drugged and improperly cared for, a state-funded study says.

The California Youth Authority is supposed to rehabilitate its 4,600 young wards, but instead often focuses on punishment such as isolating offenders in wire cages, two experts said in a confidential report obtained Wednesday by The Associated Press.

Inadequately trained therapists frequently treated youths suffering mental illness and substance abuse problems with prescription drugs instead of providing proper therapy. A majority of the wards suffer mental or drug-abuse problems.

State officials are not disputing the findings, and Youth

and Adult Correctional Agency spokesman Tip Kindel said Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger’s administration inherited the problems but is trying to fix them “on a fast track.”

“The vast majority of youths who have mental health needs are made worse instead of improved by the correctional environment,” reported University of Washington child psychologist Eric Trupin and forensic psychiatrist Raymond Patterson of Washington, D.C.

Drugs are frequently administered to restrain misbehaving youths who are of no apparent danger to themselves or others, while, “In a number of facilities, psychiatric evaluations are cursory and do not meet accepted professional standards,” the report said.

Widespread use of so-called “chemical restraints” is intolerable, said Sen. Gloria Romero, who chairs a

corrections oversight committee.

“This is not the 1930s. Even in mental hospitals, I thought we’d gotten rid of these practices long ago,” she said.

The state-funded report is the first of six being conducted as part of a class-action lawsuit by the San Francisco-based nonprofit Prison Law Office alleging poor conditions and treatment at the state’s 11 youth institutions, which handle young people up to age 25.

The experts said there’s been some progress, but cited wide variations among the nine institutions they reviewed.

The report’s release comes a week after two teenage boys hanged themselves at the Preston Youth Correctional Facility in Ione, east of Sacramento.

“We have got a serious problem, and before another teenager commits suicide the California Youth Authority has got to get its act together,” Romero said.

Fla. woman breathes after declared dead

DAYTONA BEACH, Fla. (AP)—Nearly an hour and a half after rescuers declared an 88-year-old woman dead inside a burning car, investigators at the scene realized she was still breathing.

Now, officials are reviewing the Wednesday morning incident, trying to figure out what went wrong in determining the condition of Barbara Clark, who died later that day.

Clark and her 87-year-old husband, John Clark, were found beside the road in their burning 1994 Volvo 850 about 4:20 a.m.

Firefighters put out the blaze and tried to rescue the couple but found no vital signs, Lt. John King said. They declared the couple dead about 4:40 a.m.

According to the police report, firefighters secured the car and waited for investigators to arrive.

Volusia County spokesman Dave Byron said a Medical Examiner’s Office employee and crime-scene investigators noticed Barbara Clark was still breathing about 6 a.m. Rescuers began first aid and called an ambulance, but she died about 12 minutes later.

Whether Clark could have been saved if someone had noticed earlier that she was still alive is one of many questions investigators hope to answer.

“All of the decisions that were made at the scene—what went into treatment at the scene—will be part of the review,” Byron told the Orlando Sentinel for Thursday’s editions.

Driver found dead in Colo. may be suspect

JOHNSTON, Iowa (AP)—Authorities believe a motorist who killed himself Wednesday after a short pursuit on a Colorado highway is a 16-year-old they had been searching for since a house sitter and a social worker were found shot to death at his Iowa home.

The body was not immediately identified, but Mesa County Sheriff’s spokeswoman Wendy Likes said “everything per our investigation leads us to believe” it is that of Tyler Pirtle.

Police began searching for Pirtle on Tuesday after the bodies of Sarah Dahlke, 21, of Marshalltown, and Greg Gaul, 41, of Des Moines, were found at the home in Johnston, an affluent Des Moines suburb.

Dahlke was watching Pirtle, the house and pets for the house’s owners, Pirtle’s father, Matthew Pirtle, and Sarah Collinson, who were in the Cayman Islands at the time of the shootings.

Gaul was a social worker and a father of six. Police did not say

why he was at the house, but a spokesman for Gaul’s family said the Pirtles were among his clients and he had received a “strange call” to go to the house that morning.

Police did not reveal a possible motive.

After authorities launched a nationwide search, a car matching the description of the red 1995 Mercury Mystique that Pirtle was believed to have been driving was found along Interstate 70 in western Colorado, 900 miles away, Johnston Police Chief Bruce Gaddis said.

A sheriff’s deputy saw the car speeding on I-70 near Grand Junction, but lost track of the car as it neared the Utah border, authorities said. Minutes later the deputy saw the car heading back the opposite direction and followed it.

The driver pulled the car 50 feet off the side of the road. The deputy ran the license plates and realized the driver could be dangerous, Likes said.

10-month-old girl drowns in toilet

LONDON, Ky. (AP)—A 10-month-old girl drowned after falling into a toilet in her family’s home, police said.

Brianna Morgan, who had just begun learning to crawl and walk, got into the bathroom, then pulled herself on top of her mother’s jewelry box which was on the floor, police said. She apparently leaned over and fell headfirst into the toilet, which held 6

inches of water.

Brianna’s 10-year-old brother discovered her and pulled her out of the toilet as another brother dialed 911, WLEX-TV reported. Their mother, who had been in the basement, tried CPR but couldn’t revive her daughter.

Police said Brianna, who was a twin, might have been in the water as long as three minutes.

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Expert warns NASA can't afford Mars plan

By **MARCIA DUNN**
AP AEROSPACE WRITER

An aerospace executive warned a presidential commission Wednesday that NASA does not have enough money—or bright young stars—to achieve President Bush's goal of returning astronauts to the moon and flying from there to Mars.

"It would be a grave mistake to undertake a major new space objective on the cheap. To do so, in my opinion, would be an invitation to disaster," said Norman Augustine, retired chairman of Lockheed Martin Corp. and head of a panel that examined the future of the space program for the first President Bush.

Augustine was among five

aerospace experts who addressed the first public hearing of the current President Bush's space exploration commission, held in Washington.

Commission member Neil deGrasse Tyson, an astrophysicist who is director of the Hayden Planetarium in New York, asked Augustine whether \$15 billion a year for 10 years would be enough to set NASA on course to fulfill the moon-and-then-on-to-Mars vision put forth by Bush one month ago. The space agency's annual budget has been around \$15 billion in recent years.

Augustine pointed out that during the next decade, NASA will still have the enormous cost of running all its centers, the space

shuttle fleet and the international space station, not to mention conducting research. He said the nation traditionally has underestimated the cost of big programs.

Tyson pressed Augustine, asking: "Are you suggesting \$150 billion over the next 10 years would not be enough if it all went to that mission?"

Augustine replied that he had not done enough analysis to give an answer, "but I guess if I had to bet, I'd bet that it wouldn't be enough."

Neither Bush nor NASA Administrator Sean O'Keefe has put a price tag on the plan to return astronauts to the moon by 2020, let alone sending them on to Mars a decade or more later. The president has proposed an extra

\$1 billion for NASA over the next five years for the initiative, and has directed the space agency to reallocate \$11 billion within its budgets over the next five years to cover startup costs.

Retired Air Force Gen. Lester Lyles, another commission member, noted that this is a national program, not a NASA program, and that the budgets and technologies of other government agencies could be tapped into.

The commission's chairman, Edward "Pete" Aldridge, a retired Pentagon official, said both the White House and NASA believe the new space initiative is affordable with small budget increases and reallocations, at least for the foreseeable future.

FCC chief calls Super Bowl show 'new low'

WASHINGTON (AP)—Janet Jackson's Super Bowl exposure was "a new low for prime-time television," the government's chief broadcast regulator told lawmakers Wednesday.

The Super Bowl halftime show featured a duet by Jackson and Justin Timberlake that ended with Timberlake tearing off part of Jackson's top and exposing her right breast to 90 million TV viewers. The singers said the incident was an accident and have apologized, but it has fueled calls for the government to pay more attention to what goes out on the nation's airwaves.

The Federal Communications Commission has received more than 200,000 complaints about the halftime show.

"The now infamous display during the Super Bowl halftime show, which represented a new low in prime-time television, is just the latest example in a growing list of deplorable incidents over the nation's airwaves," FCC Chairman Michael Powell told the Senate Commerce Committee.



Powell

Powell was joined by the four other FCC commissioners, all of whom have called for tougher penalties against broadcasters who violated indecency laws.

Powell told lawmakers the commission has aggressively gone after violators and would start doing more, including fining broadcasters for each incident rather than each program, and revoking licenses of some serial violators.

And he said he has asked broadcasters and cable operators to take steps to curb indecent and other inappropriate programming.

"Action must be taken by the entire television and radio industry to heed the public's outcry and take affirmative steps to curb the race to the bottom," Powell said. "This industry simply must help clean up its own room."

Bush vague on gay marriage amendment

WASHINGTON (AP)—The White House refused to commit President Bush on Wednesday to supporting a constitutional amendment to ban gay marriages, although conservative groups say they already have received high-level assurances that he will take that step.

White House press secretary Scott McClellan said the administration was closely watching events in Massachusetts, where state lawmakers are on the verge of voting

on a constitutional amendment to ban same-sex marriages.

"The president has said that he is committed to doing what is legally needed to protect the sanctity of marriage," McClellan said. "And he has said, if necessary, he would support a constitutional amendment. That is what he has previously said. But at this point, we continue to look very closely at this issue. Obviously, if there are any updates, I will keep you posted."

McClellan said the administration was still studying last week's Massachusetts Supreme Court advisory opinion that gays are entitled to nothing less than marriage and that civil unions will not suffice. The opinion set the stage for the nation's first legally sanctioned same-sex weddings by the spring. But Massachusetts lawmakers were set to vote Wednesday on a constitutional amendment that would ban gay marriages.

Bush has denounced the Massachusetts ruling as "deeply troubling." In his State of the Union address last month, Bush had delighted conservatives by saying that if judges "insist on forcing their arbitrary will upon the people, the only alternative left to the people would be the constitutional process."

Conservative leaders said they had received a White House pledge last week that Bush will support a constitutional amendment.

arc velentine

Kerry’s chief rivals face some steep odds

By **RON FOURNIER**
AP POLITICAL WRITER

John Kerry’s chief rivals all but ceded three weekend elections to the high-striding presidential front-runner on Wednesday, covering their retreat with fresh claims that he is a flip-flopping Washington insider who would lead the party to defeat this fall.

Southern natives John Edwards and Wesley Clark pointed their cash-strapped campaigns to next Tuesday’s elections in Tennessee and Virginia, gambling that they can survive to fight Kerry in Wisconsin Feb. 17. A third challenger, Howard Dean, also had his sights set on a Wisconsin showdown.

The odds are stacked against all three. In a war of attrition, Kerry has the most allies, the longest supply lines and weakened adversaries.

“Without money, you can’t have the troops. Without troops, you can’t compete. How can you compete with a guy who can write himself a check for ads in California?” said Michigan pollster Ed Sarpolus.

Clark, Edwards and Dean hope to rise out of Wisconsin as the only alternative to Kerry when the race turns to contests in California, New York and eight other “Super Tuesday” states March 2.

Two officials close to Clark,

speaking on condition of anonymity, said the retired Army general considered dropping out of the race Tuesday night after scoring a single victory, a nail-biter in Oklahoma. They said his wife, Gert, helped talk him into staying in the race against the advice of some backers.

In another sign of trouble, Clark’s staff agreed to a pay freeze to pay for television ads.

The hopes of Edwards, Clark and Dean hinged on two matters that were out of their control—Kerry’s performance and his past. A plodding and imperfect campaigner, the Massachusetts senator could make a mistake or be scorched under the spotlight cast upon his nearly 20-year record in the Senate.

To that end, the challengers are trumpeting media reports about Kerry’s ties to special interests and lobbyists.

“If we’re going to have a president who’s not a Washington insider, who knows the changes that need to take place in Washington to change America, I need to be the president,” Edwards told CNN the day after he won South Carolina to keep his candidacy alive.

Kerry won five states and the lion’s share of the delegates Tuesday, taking command of the race. Of the 269 delegates up for grabs, Kerry won 144, Edwards 66, Clark 50, Dean seven and Al Sharpton two.



Work-study job at Hooters draws school ire

GUYTON, Ga. (AP)—A high school senior’s choice for a work-study job was a little too racy in the eyes of her superintendent.

Laura Williams, 17, took a job about a month ago as a hostess at a Hooters restaurant, the national chain known for its scantily clad waitresses.

Superintendent Michael Moore has asked Williams to quit, saying the job is not appropriate for a work-study program.

“I have questions in my mind because of the advertising and sexual connotations,” Moore said.

But Larry Williams said he does not mind his daughter working at the restaurant. He planned to appeal to the school board and argue that his daughter should be allowed to keep her job.

“I went to Hooters for an hour, and six families came in for supper during that time,” he said. “This is a chain restaurant with high standards.”

Earlier in the school year, Laura Williams got a job

cleaning homes and businesses, but was encouraged by a school adviser to find a job where her performance could be better monitored, her father said.

Ga. lawmakers mull smoking-in-cars law

ATLANTA (AP)—Georgia lawmakers are considering a first-in-the-nation law that would require drivers who smoke to roll down the windows before lighting up with children in the car.

The measure, approved 9-0 Wednesday by a state House committee, would impose a \$15 fine.

Supporters say toddlers need legal protection from second-hand smoke. Opponents consider the measure intrusive.

The House narrowly approved the measure last year, but the Senate rejected the idea. The bill will not get a better reception this year, said Sen. Eric Johnson, a Senate leader.

“That’s not to say that smoking in a car with small children isn’t wrong. It’s horribly wrong,” he said. “But if we’re going to make everything bad for you illegal, and then fine you \$15 for doing it, we could balance the budget just on that.”

No other state restricts smoking in private cars.

Cubans in car-boat are stopped at sea

MIAMI (AP)—Eleven Cubans trying to sail to Florida in a 1950s Buick converted into a tailfinned boat were intercepted at sea by the Coast Guard and will be sent back to their homeland, exile activists said Wednesday.

Marciel Basanta Lopez and Luis Grass Rodriguez, the two men who turned the classic car into a floating vessel, tried a similar stunt last summer and got caught: They set out for Florida in a 1951 Chevy pickup with pontoons made out of empty 55-gallon drums and a propeller that pushed it along at about 8 mph.

On Monday, the men set out again, with four other adults and five children, relatives said. The Coast Guard intercepted the group late Tuesday en route to the Florida Keys, picking them up about 10 miles off Marathon, which is about 90 miles southwest of Miami, activist Arturo Cobo said.

Cobo said the Coast Guard sank the Buick. The Coast Guard refused to confirm the floating car’s status, but it used machine gun fire to sink the first vehicle-powered barge.

“My uncle is very brave,”

Eduardo Perez Grass, a nephew of Grass Rodriguez, said in Havana, adding that the others on board were Grass Rodriguez’s wife and son; Marciel Basanta’s wife and their two children; and a third couple with two children.

Charges stand in fatal fire crew crash

PORTLAND, Ore. (AP)—A judge on Wednesday refused to dismiss charges against a firefighting company over the deaths of one of its crews in a van crash last summer.

Eight firefighters working for First Strike Environmental, of Roseburg, were killed when their van crashed in eastern Oregon as they were returning from an Idaho wildfire.

The company is charged with reckless endangerment and drunken driving, punishable by fines. The prosecution alleges supervisors at First Strike knew a large amount of alcohol had been bought during the firefighters’ trip home.

Umatilla County Judge Garry Reynolds rejected company arguments that it was also a victim in the case, and that a prosecutor failed to provide enough detail about the alleged drinking blamed for the crash.

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Asia

Bush official: N. Korea buys nuke info

By BARRY SCHWEID
AP DIPLOMATIC WRITER

WASHINGTON (AP)—Companies across Europe and Asia are providing North Korea with vital technology for its nuclear weapons program, probably without the knowledge of their governments, a senior Bush administration official said Wednesday.

The equipment is being used for a uranium centrifuge system, the official told The Associated Press on

condition of anonymity.

The official said that equipment includes rotors—spinning tubes in which uranium gas is separated.

Negotiations that the Bush administration hopes will end the program are due to resume Feb. 25 in Beijing.

The administration estimates North Korea has produced at least one nuclear weapon and could turn out several more if the program is not halted.

In the meantime, Pakistani scientist Abdul Qadeer Khan has disclosed he

ran a black market operation that provided weapons technology to North Korea, Iran and Libya.

However, North Korea has been shopping worldwide, beyond Pakistan, and making a great effort to cover up its quest for nuclear weapons technology, the official said.

Many companies in Europe and Asia have responded positively, providing the equipment, the official said.

He declined to identify the countries where the companies are located.

Kahn’s operation, meanwhile, probably stretches beyond North Korea, Iran and Libya, he said.

Under an arrangement worked out with the United States, the amnesty initially given to the scientist by Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf was made on condition that Kahn would provide more information about the network, the official said.

That gives Kahn an incentive to reveal more. Otherwise, he could be prosecuted, the official said.

The Bush administration has known about Kahn’s operation for three years, but there could be parts of it still unknown to the United States, the official said.

Musharraf said this week that the administration first provided evidence to his government last November.

But State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said Tuesday that apart from general concerns, American officials have turned over “pieces of information” to Pakistan for some time.

US concerned about Chinese missiles

BEIJING (AP)—A U.S. defense official said Wednesday that he expressed concern to Chinese officials about their buildup of missiles aimed at rival Taiwan and said Beijing might be damaging its own interests by increasing regional tensions.

Undersecretary of Defense Douglas Feith was in Beijing for annual defense consultations, which came five weeks before a planned referendum by Taiwan that has prompted Chinese criticism. It asks voters whether the Taiwanese government should step up defenses if Chinese doesn’t remove missiles pointed at the island.

China and Taiwan have been ruled separately since splitting amid civil war in 1949. Beijing claims the island as its

territory and repeatedly has threatened to attack. China’s military has several hundred missiles aimed at the island.

“We expressed our concern about the Chinese missile buildup across from Taiwan and made the point that we have important shared interests, and we don’t think those interests are being served by that missile buildup,” Feith said. “That does not contribute to a reduction of tensions.”

The Chinese government had no immediate comment.

The consultations are part of growing U.S.-Chinese military ties that Washington regards as a key part of relations with Beijing. Contacts were cut off following the midair collision of a U.S. Navy spy plane and

a Chinese fighter jet three years ago, and are recovering slowly.

The Chinese delegation was led by Xiong Guangkai, deputy chief of general staff of the People’s Liberation Army. Feith also met with Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing and Defense Minister Cao Gangchuan.

Feith made his comments to a small group of invited American newspaper reporters at the U.S. Embassy. The Associated Press was barred from the meeting, but the embassy provided a recording of his comments.

Feith said the two sides “discussed Taiwan at length” and Chinese officials brought up the referendum. But he said the Americans didn’t discuss the vote because it wasn’t a defense-related issue.

Malaysia minister denies criminal charges

KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia (AP)—Malaysia’s land minister pleaded innocent Thursday to corruption charges connected to illegal multimillion-dollar stock trades in his home state.

Land and Cooperative Development Minister Kasitah Gaddam, arrested earlier Thursday, was charged with two counts of corruption involving the sale of millions of ringgit dollars worth of shares in a plantation company held by the Sabah Land Development Board, which he chairs.

It was the second arrest in a week under a crackdown on corruption ordered by Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

Kasitah was released on \$263,000

bail and ordered to surrender his passport.

On the first count, prosecution documents presented to the court allege Kasitah used his position as chairman of the state land body to approve the sale of 16.8 million shares it held in SAPI Plantations to Briskmark Enterprises. Kasitah was promised 3.6 million of the SAPI Plantations shares to arrange the sale, prosecutors allege.

The second count accuses Kasitah of deceiving the rest of the board into approving the sale. Zawawi Nordin, deputy director general of the Anti-Corruption Agency, said the illegal transactions were worth up to \$10.5 million, the Bernama national news agency reported.

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Beijing stifles hopes on democracy



AP
Hong Kong's No. 2 official, Chief Secretary for Administration Donald Tsang, speaks to lawmakers on Wednesday, Feb. 11, 2004, about his trip to Beijing to discuss constitutional reforms in Hong Kong.

By DIRK BEVERIDGE
AP WRITER

HONG KONG (AP)—Dimming hopes for quick democratic reforms in Hong Kong, a top official said Wednesday the government here can't introduce legislation on changing its election methods without consent from Beijing.

"It is not only a matter for Hong Kong, but it must be thoroughly discussed with and approved by the central government," Secretary for Administration Donald Tsang told lawmakers.

Tsang appeared in the Legislative Council to brief members on meetings he held earlier in the week with mainland officials who have

made it clear Hong Kong cannot become more democratic of its own accord.

Ordinary Hong Kong people are unable to choose their leader, although they directly elect some lawmakers. But universal suffrage is set out as an eventual goal in Hong Kong's constitution, and demands for it have grown after six years under unpopular Chief Executive Tung Chee-hwa.

The push for democracy gained momentum after a July 1 march by 500,000 people forced Tung to back down on plans to enact an anti-subversion law that critics called a threat to the territory's freedoms.

Tsang's comments underscored that Hong Kong people will have to bow to Beijing's

broad views on the matter.

Beijing leaders have "emphasized, when considering this issue, we must look at the big picture, consider the country's interests on the whole, as well as Hong Kong's long-term interests, its legal position and economic development," Tsang said.

On Tuesday, China's state-run Xinhua News Agency quoted unidentified Chinese officials as saying Hong Kong should be governed by local people "with patriots as the main body."

Tsang said China was only reiterating what it had said in the 1980s when it was negotiating the handover with Britain. "The people managing Hong Kong's affairs should be Hong Kongers who love the motherland and Hong Kong," he said.

US likely to launch China resolution

UNITED NATIONS (AP)—The United States will likely call for international criticism of China's human rights record at the upcoming meeting of the United Nations' top human rights body, a senior U.S. official said Wednesday.

The Bush administration is moving toward introducing a resolution at the U.N. Human Rights Commission condemning China because last year "it was radio silence from Beijing" over human rights concerns, the official said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

At the 2003 session, the United States decided not to introduce a China resolution because Beijing took some significant steps on human rights in 2002.

Washington is now concerned that more Chinese are being arrested, lawyers trying to defend clients are ending up in jail, and only two prominent prisoners were released in 2003, the official said.

China's human rights record was the subject of a lengthy discussion at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace on Jan. 29. According to a transcript, Lorne Craner, the U.S. assistant secretary of state for democracy, human rights and labor, raised the possibility of introducing a resolution criticizing China.

In the past, China has blocked U.S. attempts to get the 53-member Human Rights Commission to pass critical resolutions. The U.S. official said Beijing would likely try to thwart any resolution introduced this year, but it wouldn't matter because Washington's aim is simply to raise the issues.

The six-week annual session of the Human Rights Commission starts March 15 in Geneva.

"Loving the motherland means not doing anything to harm the country's interests, and loving Hong Kong means not doing anything to harm Hong Kong's interests," he said.

Chinese coal mine explosion kills 24

BEIJING (AP)—A gas explosion in a coal mine in southern China killed 24 miners on Wednesday, the government said.

Fifteen miners escaped alive after the blast at 11:35 a.m. in the Yinjiadi Coal Mine in Liupanshui, a city in the Guizhou region, the State Administration for Supervision of Production Safety said.

Rescue work was ongoing, the official Xinhua News Agency reported.

China's mines are among the world's deadliest, with thousands of deaths reported every year in fires, explosions and floods. Accidents often are blamed on lack of required fire and ventilation equipment or failure to enforce safety rules.

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China’s Hu signs major deals with French

By JOHN LEICESTER
AP WRITER

PARIS (AP)—A market hungry for investment. Millions of people to transport. Power needs to supply. Having scored wins on Taiwan and ties with Europe, China’s president attended to business on Wednesday, luring heavyweight French firms with enticing visions of his nation’s surging economy.

Wrapping up his three-day visit, Hu Jintao was to preside over the signing of nine business and research deals Wednesday, covering electronics, nuclear power, car manufacturing and other industries, French Prime

Minster Jean-Pierre Raffarin’s office said.

The Chinese president first hosted a “Who’s Who” of major French business leaders at his Paris hotel Wednesday morning. He outlined China’s economic needs, the opening of its markets as a relatively new member of the World Trade Organization, and its desire for foreign investment and technology, participants said.

Doing business in China “has become a reality for many of us instead of just the long-term ambition that it was still a few years ago,” said Henri Proglio, chairman of French utilities group Veolia. Last month, it

signed a contract worth \$10.7 billion over 50 years to manage water supply and treatment in the Chinese city of Shenzhen.

France feels its economic ties with China have not kept pace with the political friendship between the two nations, but French officials hope Hu’s visit will help change that. Hu leaves Thursday after a brief visit to European aircraft maker Airbus.

Hu won strong support from French President Jacques Chirac for the ending of a European arms embargo imposed on China after it crushed democracy demonstrations 15 years ago. Chirac also took China’s side against Taiwan, sternly warning

the island against its referendum plans for March. Beijing claims Taiwan as part of its territory and opposes the vote.

While Hu thanked France for its support, Taiwan’s government expressed “strong displeasure” Wednesday.

The 14 companies that sent their top brass to shake hands with Hu and listen to his sales pitch Wednesday ranged from oil giant Total to engineering and telecommunications companies Alstom and Alcatel, as well as defense and aerospace companies Thales and EADS and hotel operator Accor.

Deals to be signed Wednesday included a \$758



Chinese President Hu Jintao listens to speeches during a visit at the Paris townhall Wednesday, Jan. 28, 2004. Former mayor Jean Tiberi is visible at right.

million investment accord between car maker PSA Peugeot Citroen and its Chinese partner Dongfeng to double production at their plant in Wuhan, central China, a spokesman for the French company said.

French glass maker Saint-Gobain, meanwhile, was to sign a deal with China’s Luo-yang Float Glass Group, and electronics companies Thomson of France and China’s TCL International were to finalize a previously announced joint venture.

There were also to be research deals, including an accord with French jet engine maker Snecma, a nuclear fusion

project with France’s Atomic Energy Commission and plans for joint work on disease epidemics with the Paris-based Pasteur Institute.

“French businesses are generally of a high technological level, while Chinese enterprises are manufacturers,” said French Commerce Minister Francois Loos. “They complement each other naturally and that’s what we have to exploit.”

Critics of China’s policies on Tibet and its human rights record have protested during Hu’s visit. Scores of lawmakers boycotted Hu’s address Tuesday to parliament. Only about 240 of the 577 lawmakers attended.

Gunman kills Afghan intelligence chief

By STEPHEN GRAHAM
AP WRITER

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP)—A gunman killed an Afghan intelligence official and then blew himself up in a troubled eastern city Wednesday in the country’s third suicide attack this year.

The Taliban claimed it carried out the attack, adding weight to the group’s threat of a suicide campaign that began with the killings of two international peacekeepers in Kabul. The assault also deepens the parallels with the insurgency raging in Iraq.

Wednesday’s attack killed the deputy intelligence chief of Khost province, Maj. Mohammed Isa Khan, provincial government spokesman Hayatullah Taniwal said.

According to Taniwal, the assailant stopped Khan’s car as he drove to his office Wednesday morning in the city of Khost, 90 miles south of Kabul.

“When he opened the window to talk to him, (the attacker) pulled a gun out from under his blanket and opened fire,” Taniwal said.

The man tried to flee, but three of Khan’s bodyguards chased the attacker. “Then he blew himself up,” Taniwal said. No one else was injured.

Syful Ardil, a Taliban spokesman, identified the attacker as Hafiz Halal, 24, a Taliban fighter from Khost.

Ardil told The Associated Press by satellite phone that Khan was attacked because he had circulated propaganda against the Taliban and had

reported about them to the U.S. forces in Afghanistan.

The ousted hardline Islamic movement has warned of a wave of suicide attacks in Afghan cities, a new tactic in their campaign against foreign troops and the U.S.-backed government of President Hamid Karzai.

Two soldiers—one Canadian, one British—from the international security force in the capital were killed in separate suicide attacks last month.

Those blasts have put NATO-led peacekeepers in the capital on edge just as they prepare to expand deeper into the provinces, and undermine claims that the Taliban are a spent force.

In another echo of tactics used against foreign troops in Iraq, peacekeepers on Thursday

defused a roadside bomb on the same road where the British soldier died.

Earlier Wednesday, a governor in another eastern province said he had escaped unhurt from a separate bomb attack he blamed on the Taliban and al-Qaida.

Sayed Fazel Akbar, the governor of Kunar province, said a remote-controlled bomb exploded Tuesday on a road near the provincial capital of Asadabad as his vehicle was passing. He said the vehicle was slightly damaged, but no one was injured.

On Monday, NATO’s military commander said the number of hardcore Taliban and al-Qaida fighters resisting U.S.-led forces in Afghanistan has dwindled to under 1,000.



China executes ex-provincial vice gov

SHANGHAI, China (AP)—A former Chinese provincial vice governor was executed on Thursday for taking more than \$600,000 in bribes, the official Xinhua News Agency said.

Wang Huaizhong, 57, was put to death by lethal injection in the eastern province of Shandong after the provincial High People’s Court rejected his appeal, Xinhua said. He was allowed to say farewell to his family, it said.

The execution comes amid gathering efforts by China’s communist leaders to rein in rampant corruption. Yet, while publicizing cases such as Wang’s in hopes of scaring other officials, the party has yet to push changes that would make it more accountable.

Earlier state media reports said Wang at first attempted to bribe investigators into dropping the case, but then admitted the charges at trial.

Wang, who served as vice governor of Anhui province from 1994 to 2001, was sentenced to death in December. He also had Reports did not say what favors Wang provided in return for the bribes, but such payments are usually made in return for jobs, government contracts and use of state assets.

Afghans appeal convictions in murder case

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP)—Two Afghans sentenced to death for the murder of a French U.N. staffer last year have appealed their convictions, a judge said Wednesday.

Bettina Goislard, 29, was shot to death Nov. 16 as she sat in a U.N. vehicle in the bazaar of the eastern city of Ghazni, some 80 miles south of the capital, Kabul. The crime prompted a U.N. pullback from the lawless region.

A court Tuesday convicted and sentenced Abdul Nabi, 28, and Zia Ahmad, 27, for the killing.

Senior judge Abdul Baset Bakhtyari said the men had appealed, adding: “Our court said they should hang, but they didn’t accept the verdict.”

China and Taiwan exchange baseball tips

TIANJIN, China (AP)—Baseball, not politics, is on Jiao Yi’s mind this week as his Tianjin Tigers journey to Taiwan for training.

“We need more practice games and to make more progress,” said Jiao, who coaches the powerhouse of China’s fledgling four-team league. “And we heard that Taiwan was quite good at baseball.”

It’s rare for China to admit that its political nemesis is good at anything. While Taiwan is a feisty, self-ruling democracy, the Beijing government insists that Taiwan is part of the communist mainland but in denial.

China’s leaders are especially worried about Taiwan’s March 20 elections, and have warned that any moves toward formal independence could lead to war.

This hard-line attitude extends to sports. Since Beijing maintains that Taiwan isn’t really a country, and many countries and international organizations concur, Taiwan can’t participate in the Olympics under its own flag and must instead parade under a neutral Olympics flag and call itself “Chinese Taipei.”

That hasn’t stopped Tianjin’s sports authority from sending its baseball players across the 100-mile strait that divides the rivals. The Tigers got permission from both sides to train in Taiwan for 35 days, starting Wednesday.

S. Korea man accused of killer web site

SEOUL, South Korea (AP)—Police arrested a 25-year-old college senior Wednesday on charges of conspiring to murder for operating a killer-for-hire Web site and taking thousands of dollars from his customers.

In one case, the student, identified only by his surname Kim, received the equivalent of \$8,600 from a 22-year-old woman who wanted her ex-boyfriend and his wife murdered, said Chung Dong-yul, a police investigator in the city of Daegu.

Kim had promised the woman, identified only as Jeong, he would have the two killed in a staged traffic accident, Chung said.

Police also arrested Jeong on charges of conspiring to murder.

According to police, Kim was also approached by a 17-year-old customer, known as

Sohn, who wanted his father and stepmother killed. Sohn was not arrested because he was a minor.

The high school student promised to give Kim most of the insurance money he would have received from his parents’ deaths. Police did not know how much insurance would be paid.

None of the killings were ever carried out and Kim will not be charge with attempted murder because he had no concrete plans to fulfill the transactions.

Kim told police he opened the Internet site because he couldn’t find a job and needed to repay a \$1,724 loan, according to Chung.

Other requests made to Kim’s online service ranged from changing grades to rape and gun smuggling, Chung said. Police did not release the Internet address of Kim’s Web site.

Chinese official sues for mistreatment

SHANGHAI, China (AP)—A county-level Chinese official has sued police for allegedly manhandling her and filming her in her underwear during a prostitution raid, an unusual challenge to the de facto impunity enjoyed by Chinese authorities.

As reported widely in Chinese media Wednesday, the lawsuit filed by Wu Yan, a deputy county chief in the northeastern province of Jilin, is demanding about \$200,000 for emotional suffering and medical costs, along with an apology printed in newspapers.

Wu said male officers burst through the door of her room at the Jiaotong hotel in the town of Shulin on the night of Nov. 18 as she was sleeping, according to the Changchun Evening News and other newspapers.

She said officers dragged her into the hallway, leaving her with cuts and bruises, then threw her on the ground and filmed her with a video camera while other

guests and hotel staff looked on.

The suit underscores the rising dissatisfaction with the often brutal measures adopted by Chinese police, who are frequently linked to corruption and are seen as largely unable to stem a nationwide surge in crime.

Because they serve a vital function in crushing any challenge to the communist state, China gives police officers considerable latitude in searching, questioning, and presenting evidence against criminal suspects. The ongoing “Strike Hard” anti-crime campaign has significantly broadened those powers and allows for faster trials and more liberal use of the death penalty.

Although police said the raid that involved Wu was prompted by a citizen’s tip, she wasn’t charged with any crime. Investigators promised Wu a public apology and compensation over the incident, but have so far only offered a private apology from police, the reports said.

kfc
+red/blue

S. Korea researchers make cloning advance

By LAURAN NEERGAARD
AP MEDICAL WRITER

WASHINGTON (AP)—Researchers in South Korea have become the first to successfully clone a human embryo, and then cull from it master stem cells that many doctors consider key to one day creating customized cures for diabetes, Parkinson’s and other diseases.

This is not cloning to make babies, but to create medicine.

It’s sure to revive international controversy over whether to ban all human cloning, as the Bush administration wants, or to allow this “therapeutic cloning” that

might eventually let patients grow their own replacement tissue.

Embryonic stem cells are the body’s building blocks, cells from which all other tissue types spring. They’re present in an embryo only days after conception and are ethically sensitive because culling stem cells destroys the embryo.

Scientists have used therapeutic cloning to partially cure laboratory mice with an immune system disease. And they know how to cull stem cells from human embryos left over in fertility clinics.

But attempts to clone human embryos—so the resulting stem cells would be genetically identical to the patient

who needs them—have failed until now.

Scientists from Seoul National University say they succeeded largely because of using extremely fresh eggs donated by South Korean volunteers and gentler handling of the genetic material inside them.

The lead scientist, veterinary cloning specialist Woo Suk Hwang, will unveil the research Thursday at a meeting of the American Academy for the Advancement of Science. Details will be published in the journal Science.

It’s elegant work that provides long-anticipated proof that human therapeutic cloning is possible, said stem-cell

researcher Dr. Rudolf Jaenisch of the Whitehead Institute for Biomedical Research in Cambridge, Mass.

Still, “it’s not of practical use at this point,” Jaenisch cautioned.

Years of additional research are required before embryonic stem cell transplants could be considered in people, he stressed.

But it’s sure to renew debate over whether all forms of human cloning should be banned. The House last year voted to do that, but the Senate stalled over whether there should be an exception for some research.

U.S. scientists almost universally

want a ban on cloning for reproduction, because the high rate of birth defects in cloned animals shows the technique is too dangerous.

But the South Korean research is “one tiny step closer to some medical use. It would be a wise thing to support,” said Laurie Zoloth, a Northwestern University bioethicist. “It is clearly time—now that it is more tangible—to set in place a process where we can have some kinds of experiments supported and some things banned.”

Internationally, the United Nations recently postponed a decision on what kinds of human cloning to ban.

Terror label hampers RP peace talks

MANILA, Philippines (AP)—Communist guerrillas have demanded that the Philippines call for their removal from terror lists of the United States and other nations, but government negotiators have refused, hampering peace talks in Norway, both sides said Thursday.

The two sides resumed negotiations Tuesday in Oslo to try to end the rebels’ bloody, 35-year rebellion, more than two years after initial talks were suspended.

However, the government said in a statement that the talks, scheduled to end Friday, have hit an impasse over the blacklisting of the Communist Party of the Philippines, its founder Jose Maria Sison, and

the armed wing, the New People’s Army, by the United States and the European Union.

Australia and Canada also lists the guerrillas as terrorists.

Rebel delegates asked the government team, led by Silvestre Bello III, to explicitly call for their removal from these terror lists, in a joint statement to be issued at the end of the talks.

Philippine officials refused and demanded that the guerrillas first show “legal and moral justification” for such an action, the government statement said.

Manila has said the blacklisting of the guerrillas is the decision of foreign governments, and the rebels should first stop their attacks before requesting their removal from the lists.

The government, however, did campaign to convince the EU to list the guerrillas as terrorists.

Rebel spokesman Gregorio Rosal claimed the government actively sought getting the rebels blacklisted, believing the action would freeze their assets abroad and pressure them into surrendering. But he said the rebels rely mostly on local support and funding.

“We’re not terrorists,” Rosal said. “If what we’ve been doing in the countryside is terrorism, the people should not have supported us for more than three decades and given their best sons and daughters to the revolution.”

The rebels also say the terrorist tag is an intervention into domestic affairs.

Asian-American groups to release a national agenda

SAN FRANCISCO (AP)—Tired of being overlooked by politicians, a coalition of Asian-American groups says it wants the presidential candidates to highlight anti-poverty programs, immigration reform and anti-discrimination efforts in their campaigns.

Seventeen organizations worked for a year to produce a 70-page platform, being released Thursday at a news conference in Washington. They say President George W. Bush and the Democratic presidential nominee should take notice of the document to win the potentially crucial Asian-American vote.

“This is really the first time we’ve come together and said we’re going to

make it clear that all of our communities are standing behind these issues,” said Karen Narasaki, president of the National Asian Pacific American Legal Consortium, a coalition member. “We felt that none of the candidates were really paying attention to our community.”

Though Asians are a small percentage of the overall population—about 4 percent—they are concentrated in key electoral states such as California, Narasaki said.

The coalition’s agenda calls for policies that help Asians overcome poverty, find affordable housing and get a good education and access to health care—issues important to most Americans.

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Death toll reaches 27 in Turkey collapse

Sharon defends plan to evacuate Gaza

JERUSALEM (AP)—Prime Minister Ariel Sharon on Wednesday defended his plan to dismantle virtually all Jewish settlements in Gaza, and there were new signs the proposal threatened the stability of his government.

Ten lawmakers from the ruling Likud Party sent a letter to Sharon threatening to abandon the prime minister if he moves forward with his plans without their consent.

“We announce beforehand that it will be very difficult for us to support this plan without the approval of the Likud institutions on this sensitive subject,” the lawmakers wrote. They added that they would not support the entry of the opposition Labor Party into the government.

A senior official said Sharon would put his unilateral disengagement plan—including removing some settlements and imposing a boundary on the West Bank if peace talks fail—before a national referendum, as demanded by Likud lawmakers.

Sharon welcomes a referendum because the issue cuts across ideological lines and “has overwhelming support among the public,” the

official said on condition of anonymity.

In Washington, State Department spokesman Richard Boucher offered tacit U.S. approval.

“It’s important that we start to make progress in resolving this issue and removing it as a difficulty between the two parties, setting up a situation where Israelis and Palestinians can both have stable lives,” he said.

“Action on settlements, action to remove settlements as a source of tension and a source of difficulty is good,” he said.

“They move us down the road,” Boucher said.

But the U.S. official said, “we’ve always been concerned about any steps that could attempt to unilaterally end the process or unilaterally impose a settlement.”

In New York, U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan gave strong backing Wednesday to Sharon’s settlement plan, saying it could provide new momentum for Mideast peace.

“The withdrawal from Gaza that has been announced by the prime minister—if it does take place—can really give us a very important moment, a new dynamic that can propel the process forward,” Annan said.

US: Iraq attacks aimed at sabotage

TIKRIT, Iraq (AP)—A senior U.S. commander said Wednesday that recent attacks in Iraq are the work of groups seeking to sabotage—or gain leverage in—a future independent Iraqi government that is due to take power by July.

Maj. Gen. Raymond Odierno, commander of the Army’s 4th Infantry Division, also predicted that coalition forces would be able to crush the insurgency within a year, despite continued American losses since the Dec. 13 capture of Saddam Hussein.

“There are ethnic issues. People are now positioning themselves to see what their role is in the next government, and they are doing it by force,” Odierno said after a tour of this city, Saddam’s hometown. “They are trying to disrupt the way things are going so they can get a little advantage.”

On Wednesday, an Iraqi insurgent group claimed responsibility for twin bombings that killed 109 people at the offices of two Kurdish political parties on Sunday. The “Jaish Ansar al-Sunna” said it targeted the “dens of the devils” because of the parties’ ties to the United States.

The U.S.-led Coalition Provisional Authority plans to hand over sovereignty to a provisional Iraqi government on June 30. The United Nations soon will dispatch a team to Iraq to resolve differences between the Americans and the Shiite Muslim clergy over how to choose the new Iraqi leadership.

“We have six to 12 months left of this insurgency,” Odierno said. “I think constant pressure will bring it down.”

So far, 528 U.S. service members have died since the Iraq war began March 20, including 368 by hostile fire. Forty-five soldiers died in January and three more in the first three days of February. The January toll was five more than in December, despite hopes that Saddam’s capture would weaken the insurgency and slow the killings from roadside bombs and other attacks.

Odierno, who is in charge of security over a large swath of north-central Iraq, did not elaborate on how insurgent attacks were aimed at gaining advantage before the power transfer. He also did not offer specific examples of such attacks.

KONYA, Turkey (AP)—Police detained two contractors Wednesday following the collapse of an apartment building that killed at least 27 people and left dozens missing. Rescuers said hopes were fading of finding more survivors.

Authorities said 31 survivors had been pulled out of the rubble since the sudden collapse of the 11-story apartment building on Monday evening.

Between 40 and 100 people were believed inside when the building crumbled, officials said. Rescue teams were working around the clock but acknowledged that chances of finding more survivors were slim.

The last survivor was

rescued Tuesday evening, almost 20 hours after the building’s collapse.

Top officials, including the prime minister, blamed shoddy construction for the disaster and police were investigating whether the contractors ignored building codes.

Police detained two of the building’s contractors, Konya Gov. Ahmet Kayhan said. The Anatolia news agency reported that police were searching for a third. It wasn’t clear what charges, if any, they could face.

Angry relatives at the site demanded punishment for the contractors.

Poor construction “led to the death of lots of people,” said

Abdulgaki Aycicek, who was waiting for news about eight missing family members, including his pregnant sister-in-law.

Officials at the scene said 27 bodies had been found and the death toll was expected to rise with dozens of people still missing. Several rescue teams began leaving the site as bulldozers and cranes were used to comb through the wreckage.

Mustafa Aycan fought back tears as he sat on a wooden plank from the debris as four members of his family who lived on the second floor of the building were missing.

“I’m hoping that that they’re in a crevice inside the building. That’s our only hope,” he said

as he and others huddled around a fire to keep warm.

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan blamed the collapse on poor construction and called for tougher building codes.

“This is entirely a technical failure. As long as the sanctions for these type of things aren’t heavy, citizens will pay the price with their life,” Erdogan said Tuesday. “Nobody has that right. We won’t allow it.”

Poor construction also was blamed for many of the 17,000 deaths in a 1999 earthquake and for the collapse in May of a dormitory in eastern Turkey during a magnitude 6.4-earthquake, which killed 84 students.

fun & games
+blue

Red Cross confident it will see Saddam

By ALEXANDER G. HIGGINS
AP WRITER

GENEVA (AP)—The Red Cross has visited imprisoned officials of Saddam Hussein’s toppled regime and expressed confidence Wednesday that U.S. authorities will allow it to see the former Iraqi dictator “sooner rather than later.”

“He’s a POW and supposed to be like any POW,” said Nada Doumani, a spokeswoman for the International Committee of the Red Cross, which requested permission to visit Saddam soon after he was captured Dec. 13 and the United States declared him a prisoner of war.

Doumani told The Associated Press in a telephone interview from Amman, Jordan,

that the neutral, Swiss-run ICRC had seen most if not all of the 43 other high-ranking Iraqis captured by coalition forces.

“We have no problem of access to other people so far,” she said. As for Saddam Hussein, she added, “We believe that we will be able to see him sooner rather than later.”

She said the visit to Saddam should happen fairly “automatically” because the ICRC, which is entitled to see POWs under the Geneva Conventions on the conduct of war, has so far had access to all coalition locations for holding POWs and civilian internees.

The agency still doesn’t know where Saddam is being held and will know for sure only when its delegates have

seen him, Doumani said.

“The Americans are saying that he’s somewhere in Iraq, as far as I understand, but we cannot confirm that or deny it,” Doumani said.

The ICRC moved many of its international staff out of Iraq following the Oct. 27 bomb attack on its Baghdad headquarters. But it has representatives who continue to visit Iraqi detainees, whether they are ordinary soldiers or among the 55 most-wanted whose faces appear in a deck of cards issued by U.S. authorities. The coalition says it has captured 44 of the 55.

“I cannot tell you by name whom we have seen and whom we haven’t and if we have skipped somebody,” Doumani said.

She said there is nothing in the Geneva Conventions that would prohibit Saddam’s being tried by a coalition tribunal.

“It can also be by an ad hoc international tribunal that can be established by a resolution of the Security Council,” she said.

“We could envision that it could happen (that the Iraqis try Saddam) once authority is transferred to the Iraqis in June and military tribunals are established again,” Doumani said.

But the ICRC doesn’t get into who conducts the trial as long as it is a military tribunal of a sovereign country that is party to the Geneva Conventions. Iraq joined the conventions in 1956 but it has been suspended while under coalition control.

The trial can be for what a

POW did before the latest war, including “other war crimes or crimes against humanity,” but “not for what he has done during the latest war for being a soldier,” she said.

She said there was some misconception about Saddam’s rights after he was declared a POW.

“Some people, especially in Iraq, thought that as long as he was given this POW status he cannot be prosecuted, which is totally wrong, because you have plenty of articles in the Third Geneva Convention where it can even go as far as a death sentence.

“But he cannot be tried for simply participating in hostilities because the whole idea for a POW is that he is a soldier doing

his job in defending his country, so you cannot try him for defending or for fighting. You can only try him if he went beyond and committed a war crime or a crime against humanity or a crime prior to war.”

Doumani noted the conventions omit setting a time frame for the visits and said it was not the ICRC’s concern when Saddam’s trial would take place.

“Whatever is done, it has to be done according to the law,” she said. “Judicial guarantees should be respected, the right to defense, impartiality, transparency and all these things,” she said. “This is valid not just for Saddam Hussein, it’s valid for any soldier, any Iraqi POW.”



A veiled Emirates woman looks at the wreckage of a Kish Air plane which crashed Tuesday in Sharjah, United Arab Emirates Wednesday, Feb. 11, 2004.

AP

Relatives ID Emirates plane crash victims

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP)—Friends and relatives of the 43 Kish Air crash victims gathered at Dubai’s tiny, crowded morgue Wednesday to identify the badly burned bodies of loved ones.

The grim task was carried out as investigators hauled away the last remains of the Kish Air Fokker 50 plane that crashed in an open area two miles from Sharjah airport Tuesday and burst into flames.

Three male survivors—an Iranian, Egyptian and a Filipino—were in “dangerous but stable” condition, a senior hospital official said Wednesday.

The plane’s recording devices were recovered.

“The flight voice and data recorders are being sent for independent analysis,” the head

of Iran’s Civil Aviation Organization, Hassan Haj Ali Fard, told The Associated Press.

Fard, who arrived in Sharjah on Tuesday, declined to say where the analysis would be done but said he was expecting results in about a week.

About a dozen investigators combed through the wreckage Wednesday as a crane loaded the plane’s blue tail, the only recognizable part in the charred rubble, on a truck that carried it away. A bulldozer cleaned up the rest of the rubble.

So far, investigators have not publicly commented on a possible cause of the crash. The pilot did not report any trouble beforehand and the plane was 11 years old—far newer than most Iranian airliners.

Kish Air, which bought

the plane in 2002, has refused to comment.

Twenty-five of the 40 passengers on the plane were foreign workers in the United Arab Emirates who left the country only to renew their visas. Labor law required them to briefly exit and re-enter to renew their visas.

UAE President Sheik Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan abolished the law Wednesday. An official statement said workers who arrive on visit visas, and find jobs, no longer would have to exit to renew their visa.

The statement did not directly mention Tuesday’s crash.

The plane was returning from the Iranian island of Kish in the Gulf, a favorite destination for visa changers. Kish Air offers the cheapest “visa change” flights, with fares of less than \$135.

beach road

Police attack rebels in Haitian slum

By IAN JAMES
AP WRITER

GONAIVES, Haiti (AP)—Police attacked rebels holed up in a slum in the port city of St. Marc on Wednesday and gunmen loyal to President Jean-Bertrand Aristide torched homes, killing two people as looting and reprisals raged in a popular revolt that has left at least 45 dead.

Outside Gonaives, where the uprising began last Thursday, witnesses said people “neck-laced” a man accused of being an Aristide spy. “They put tires on him, poured gasoline and burned him,” 17-year-old

Patricia Joseph told a reporter. “Everyone stood up and said it was good.”

With the Haitian government locked in a deadly battle with opponents, the White House on Wednesday issued a rebuke of Aristide’s government.

“We are extremely concerned about the wave of violence spreading through Haiti. And we certainly deeply regret the loss of life,” said Scott McClellan, press secretary to President Bush. “We call on the government to respect the rights, especially human rights, of the citizens and residents of Haiti.”

Haiti has suffered increasing

violence since Aristide’s party swept flawed legislative elections in 2000 and international donors blocked millions in aid. Opponents say they will not take part in new elections unless Aristide resigns.

In St. Marc, an important port 45 miles west of Port-au-Prince, gunmen loyal to Aristide shot up a southern neighborhood before dawn Wednesday and torched three houses, witnesses told The Associated Press. They said two people were killed; it was unclear whether they died in the blaze or in the shooting.

Government opponents burned down a clinic because

officials refused to hand over two wounded anti-government militants, Radio Vision 2000 reported. It said Aristide militants seeking revenge then set an opposition radio station ablaze.

In the northern port of Cap-Haitien, sporadic gunshots crackled overnight and attackers looted a food warehouse, taking advantage of a blackout because the city has run out of fuel for generators.

Aristide supporters set up blazing barricades, blocking the city for a second day against a possible rebel incursion.

“We’re going to devour

them,” Jean-Claude Joseph, 35, said at a roadblock.

In Gonaives, rebels controlled crowds fighting over dwindling gasoline supplies.

“Get in line. Don’t push!” shouted three rebels who held their rifles high in the air in warning. People obeyed.

“I’ve been here since 6 o’clock,” Antreuil Petithomme, in her 60s, complained in the crowd hoping to fill jerry cans.

“I want to resell it and try to buy some flour to make food,” she said, explaining food prices have multiplied since rebels and citizens supporting them have blocked roads with massive

barricades against a possible counterattack by police.

But no police were seen near the city 60 miles from Port-au-Prince, and government officials indicated that, to prevent civilian casualties, any counterattack might take time.

“To avoid the suffering and involvement of the civilian population, we have to implement a strategy,” Gerard Dubreuille, undersecretary for public security, said Tuesday. “Our reaction may be slow, it will be efficient.”

Police have retaken three of 11 towns in northern and western Haiti.

Men tell of UK shell fishing turf wars

LONDON (AP)—A lawyer for two men arrested on suspicion of manslaughter over the deaths of 19 Chinese shellfish hunters said Wednesday that the pair went voluntarily to the police to provide information about “turf wars” in the industry.

Tony Nelson said his clients, David Eden and his son, also called David, had no involvement in the drowning deaths of the cockle pickers in Morecambe Bay on Thursday and had themselves received threats to their business.

The father and son, who run the Liverpool Bay Fishing Company, were arrested Monday after presenting themselves to police and were released on bail.

“There is no suggestion that they were acting as gangmasters, nor of their exploiting those who lost their lives so tragically,” Nelson said in a statement. “At

no time have my clients ever been to Morecambe Bay, and nor were they ever at any time supervising those who died.”

Police on Wednesday released the five remaining suspects held on suspicion of manslaughter. Two women were released on bail and three men were handed to immigration services.

The five were among the reported 16 survivors of the mass drowning in Morecambe Bay, a rich cockle-hunting ground in northern England notorious for its treacherous sands and tides.

Seventeen men and two women died after becoming caught in the bay’s powerful tides.

Prime Minister Tony Blair declined to comment directly on the investigation but said the government would consider tougher laws to deal with the abuse of immigrant workers.

“Where people are operating for the purposes of greed or exploitation it is absolutely right we take action, if necessary legal action, by changing the law,” he told the House of Commons.

Blair added that the government’s proposed Asylum Bill, currently before Parliament, would make it an offense to traffic people in or out of Britain for the purposes of exploitation.

Nelson said the Edens gave police information about a turf war among cocklers in Morecambe Bay. He added that the Edens had received anonymous threats before the disaster, which they reported to police.

“My clients understand that the Chinese cockling group were consistently thwarted in their efforts by various acts of sabotage, such as the destruction of their product by fire and diesel,” he said.



Fishermen collect cockles in Morecambe Bay, northwest England, in the early morning low tide Wednesday, Feb. 11, 2004.

“They understood that the reason the cocklers set out last Thursday at that time was to avoid conflict and contact with other cocklers,” he added.

Collecting cockles—a

shellfish that lives just below the surface of muddy sand—was once a cottage industry in Britain. It is now a highly profitable export business but largely unregulated.

The deaths highlighted the exploitation of new immigrants by so-called “gangmasters” in the multimillion dollar cockling industry, leading to calls for tighter regulation.

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Science & Technology

Life & Style

Russian industrialist
buys Faberge eggs



By ULA ILNYTZKY
AP WRITER

NEW YORK (AP)—A Russian industrialist privately purchased the Forbes collection of historic Faberge art pieces, including nine rare Imperial Easter Eggs, for an undisclosed sum and ahead of a scheduled auction.

The eggs, all commissioned by Russian czars in the late 1800s, and more than 180 other Faberge pieces were bought by Victor Vekselberg, Sotheby's said Wednesday.

Sotheby's had

estimated the entire collection at up to \$90 million. The Coronation Egg—the most valued piece—could fetched as much as \$24 million at auction, Sotheby's said.

The private sale negotiated by Sotheby's on behalf of the Forbes family "happened very quickly," said Diana Phillips, an auction house spokeswoman. She wouldn't disclose the purchase price but said: "It was a very serious offer that the Forbes family accepted." Sotheby's had planned to auction the items in April.

Carl Faberge, who created jewelry for European royalty in the 19th century, was commissioned by Czar Alexander III in 1885 to create an Easter gift for his wife, Czarina Marina Feodorovna. Nicholas II continued the tradition, and the collection grew.

The eggs, about 5 inches tall, are intricately designed and individually crafted. The Coronation Egg is made of gold enamel and contains a replica of the coach Czarina Alexandra rode into Moscow in 1897.

Only the Kremlin owns more Faberge Imperial eggs—at 10.

"The Faberge Egg collection,"

said Vekselberg, "represents perhaps the most significant example of our cultural heritage outside Russia. The religious, spiritual and emotional content captured by these Faberge eggs touches upon the soul of the Russian people."

Malcolm S. Forbes, the late publisher and editor of Forbes magazine, collected the eggs from the 1960s until his death in 1990. His family had said the auction would free it from the upkeep of the collection.

In a statement issued by Sotheby's, the family said it was "delighted that the advent of a new era in Russia has made possible the return of these extraordinary objects. It is an astonishingly romantic ending to one of the great stories in art history."

The eggs and other choice pieces from the collection, including stone carvings, gold cigarette cases and gem-studded picture frames, will be displayed at Sotheby's New York galleries—on a date to be announced later—before Vekselberg returns the collection to Russia.

Vekselberg is chairman of the board of directors of Renova, an investment and business development company. He was instrumental in forging a Russian-U.S. partnership that acquired the controlling rights to Tyumen Oil Company, now Russia's third largest oil and gas company.

A jeweled coach and the Coronation Egg which holds it, which were presented by Tsar Nicholas II to his wife the Czarina Alexandra, are shown in this undated file photo. The egg is one of the nine Faberge Imperial Easter Eggs sold by the Forbes family to Russian industrialist Victor Vekselberg, Sotheby's announced on Wednesday.

AP

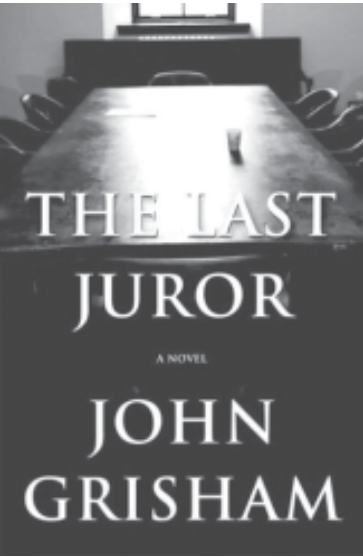
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Grisham returns with ‘Last Juror’

By ELIZABETH A. KENNEDY
AP WRITER

NEW YORK (AP)—Year after year, for more than a decade, John Grisham has been writing best sellers that bring criticism from both readers and critics alike.



“The worst letters come from retired high school English teachers,” Grisham said during an interview with The Associated Press to publicize his 17th book. “They will literally take a book and pick it to pieces and send me 14 pages of notes.”

Despite those armchair editors—and some “really, really bad reviews” from critics—Grisham’s aim is simply to make popular books that people love to read. And he has succeeded, with more than 100 million books in print in the United States alone.

The harsh reviews seem to be softening, though, with his new book, “The Last Juror,” which The New York Times praised this week as “a reminder of how the Grisham juggernaut began.”

Still, Grisham, who turns 49 on Sunday, tries not to pay much attention. “I’ve sold too many books to ever be taken seriously by critics,” he said. “What I think about is making the best book I’ve ever written. That’s my goal every time.”

His latest novel is a return to the fictional town of Clanton, Miss., the setting of 1989’s “A Time to Kill,” his first book. “The Last Juror,” set in the 1970s, follows Willie Traynor, a young reporter who buys a struggling newspaper and thinks it will be easy running a weekly in a sleepy town.

Clanton doesn’t stay sleepy for long. Danny Padgitt, a member of a wealthy family, is accused of brutally raping and murdering a woman in front of her two young children. The case is a slam-dunk—the victim’s last words were, “It was Danny Padgitt”—and the Ford County Times rivets the town with the trial’s lurid details.

But when someone starts targeting those who convicted Padgitt and a gunshot rips through a window about 20 feet above Willie’s head, his career choice no longer seems so safe.

The book is sure to satisfy Grisham’s millions of fans, with a host of colorful characters and a fast-moving courtroom drama. But it also has contemplative scenes about those turbulent years of school desegregation, the Vietnam War and their impact on an insular town.

“This story was always rattling around back there, always ready to be written,” said Grisham, who enjoyed living vicariously through Willie, a long-haired smart aleck who spent his college days smoking pot and protesting the war.

Grisham was much more conservative back then. Even now, he’s known as somewhat of a sober figure—there’s no lascivious sex or particularly foul language in his books.

Even his attire—brown corduroy suit and blue tie—is modest, understated. He speaks with a slight drawl and is well-mannered and friendly, even though he’d rather be home in Virginia than talking to a reporter.

Born in Arkansas and raised throughout the South, Grisham was a small-town lawyer and state legislator in Southaven, Miss., when he decided in the early 1980s to wake at dawn every morning to write a novel about a racially charged rape and murder trial.

Published by a small press in 1989, “A Time to Kill” sold just 5,000 copies. Then came “The Firm,” which sold 1 million copies in 1991 and made Grisham a star. Now, a standard first printing for a Grisham hardcover is an astronomical 2.8 million copies, according to Stephen Rubin, president of Doubleday, which publishes Grisham’s books.



AP
Author John Grisham poses for a portrait at his publisher’s office in New York, Feb. 3, 2004.

cuc 004

pss ifb 003

Oh, for the swift return of my buns-warming car

My car is in the body shop. It was hit by a tree. At least that's the story the person who was driving at the time is telling. Fortunately, no one was injured. Which is not to say there hasn't been some personal tragedy. I have been forced, during all this frigid weather, to live without heated-leather seats. If you have never experienced heated-leather seats, I doubt that you are feeling my pain. If, however, you are familiar with the warm caress of hot leather on cold buns, there is a good chance you are weeping at this very moment. But don't cry for me, Argentina. As is often the case, a positive has arisen from this adversity - a can't-miss fashion opportunity. Ready? Heated-leather pants. They're hot. They're portable. They're cheaper than a car. I'm looking for investors, so if you're interested, have your people call my people. Anyway, while I am waiting for my car to be repaired, I have been driving a rental. I can't remember the make or model, but you see a lot of these cars outside restaurants where they serve dinner real early. For the record, I did not request this car specifically. All I said to the rental guy was that I wanted something full size with a trunk big enough to hold a half-dozen or so bodies. I was joking. He didn't laugh. I think that had something to do with his being from New Jersey. Truth is, I've never liked rental cars. For one thing, they're hard to get used to. I know this sounds weird, but the rental I'm in right now kind of floats. It's not too bad during the day, when you can see the horizon, but at night, it makes you a little queasy. The other thing I don't like about rentals is the ickiness factor. Sitting in a rental is similar to sleeping in a hotel bed. You just can't stop wondering about who was there before you and what manner of unspeakable things they may have done. Then there is the odor problem, which, no matter how many of those little Christmas trees they stuff under the seat, cannot be eliminated. It's probably just my luck, but I always seem to get the car the guy with the terminal gastrointestinal problem turned in just before he was beamed up to that big Beano patch in the sky. As you can well imagine, I'm dying to get my car back, but I'm not optimistic it will happen anytime soon. Let's just say the damage estimate would make you whistle. And it keeps going up. I just hope the tree was insured.



By JIM SHEA
The Hartford Courant

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WALLACE

Yao Ming tops list of Chinese celebrities

SHANGHAI, China (AP)—Houston Rockets star Yao Ming topped Forbes Magazine's 2004 list of Chinese celebrities, ending up head and shoulders over entertainers including martial arts star Jet Li and "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon" actress Zhang Ziyi.

The 7-foot-6 center, now in his second season with the NBA, ranked first based on "heavy exposure in media and Web hits in China," the magazine said in a news release on its Web site.

Yao also recorded the second-highest 2003 income among Chinese celebrities: \$14.6 million.

The top money-earner was Li, star of last year's action thriller "Cradle 2 The Grave," who chalked up earnings of \$17 million in 2003. Li ranked 10th overall on the celebrity list.

Zhang took second place on the list, followed by fellow actress Zhao Wei and Hong Kong-based singer-actress Fay Wong. Veteran film star Gong Li



Houston Rockets center Yao Ming, from China, handles the ball during practice for the 2003 NBA All Star Game in Atlanta on Feb. 8, 2003.

came in fifth, followed by Zhang Yimou, the award-winning director of "Raise the Red Lantern" and other films featuring Gong.

The list, published in Forbes China, the magazine's Chinese-language version, surveyed the income and popularity of celebrities in film, sports, media, music and publishing. Those listed had to have been born and raised in mainland China; celebrities from Hong Kong, Taiwan and other parts of the Chinese-speaking world were excluded.

Despite that requirement, those listed were notable in that most achieved fame only after garnering an international audience.

"The list reflects the rapid growth in China's entertainment industry," list compiler Bobby Hao said in Forbes. "It's clear that more and more people from the mainland are making an impact and finding success overseas."

Wife caught up in swinging now has feet on the ground

By ABIGAIL VAN BUREN

DEAR ABBY: Your response to "Wavering," whose husband wanted her to accompany him to a swingers' party, was right on. If she goes, not only will the dynamics of her marriage change forever, she may never regain her self-confidence.

My husband talked me into the same thing in 1978, soon after our first child was born. I knew his first marriage had failed due to boredom, affairs, etc., and I naively thought it would keep him from straying. By the late '80s, I could no longer handle the lifestyle and the constant worry about AIDS. I finally got strong enough to say, "No more!"

In 2001, one year short of our silver anniversary, I learned my husband had been having affairs throughout our entire relationship, with or without the parties. We have been separated ever since, but only recently has he admitted that he needs help and is finally getting it—too late for us.

Throughout our entire marriage, I never felt good enough because my husband always wanted something more. I didn't know until I began counseling, after our separation, that there was nothing I could have done to change his behavior or to satisfy him.

I wish I could take back all the swinging. I am so ashamed. I have herpes, but thank God I don't have AIDS. (By the way, he infected me with herpes before we ever started going to the swingers' parties.) I was too blind to see the truth.

Please tell "Wavering" NEVER to give in. Due to his sexual addiction, it's possible that her husband is already cheating.

FOOLED FOR YEARS

DEAR FOOLED: Thank you for the powerful testimonial. While some couples argue that swinging opens up new doors of adventure, I see it as slamming the door on what should be a precious, meaningful, mutual demonstration of love between husband and wife.

Regret is the cancer of life. You cannot change the past. I hope you are still in counseling because it will help you to forgive yourself for your mistake.

DEAR ABBY: I am a 15-year-old girl who feels taken advantage of by my neighbor, "Tammy."

I baby-sat for her. But when it came time to pay me the \$20 she owed me, Tammy said she didn't have the cash on her and promised to pay me the next day. Well, she never did. Recently Tammy told me she'd pay me for dog sitting. She still owes me that money, too.

I am sick of doing jobs for her without getting anything in return. Am I selfish for not wanting to help Tammy any more? Is it wrong to expect to be paid at the end of the job? Or should I let things slide and think of it as pure generosity?

UNPAID HELP IN KNOXVILLE

DEAR UNPAID: No, you should not let it slide. Your neighbor is taking advantage of your youth and inexperience. The next time she asks to hire you, make it clear that until she makes good on the money she owes you, you are not available.

DEAR ABBY: We've included our 2 1/2-year-old child's voice on our answering machine greeting. Recently an attorney advised us against this because of all the weirdos out there.

What is the safest message to put on an answering machine these days?

CONCERNED PARENTS

DEAR CONCERNED: An adult male voice should say, "Please leave your name, number, the time and date that you called and a brief message, and we will get back to you."

Dear Abby is written by Abigail Van Buren, also known as Jeanne Phillips, and was founded by her mother, Pauline Phillips. Write Dear Abby at www.DearAbby.com or P.O. Box 69440, Los Angeles, CA 90069.

For an excellent guide to becoming a better conversationalist and a more attractive person, order "How to Be Popular." Send a business-size, self-addressed envelope, plus check or money order for \$5 (U.S. funds only) to: Dear Abby Popularity Booklet, P.O. Box 447, Mount Morris, IL 61054-0447. (Postage is included.)

Hollywoodstars perform in Londonplays

LONDON (AP)—More Hollywood stars are popping up in the West End, with Julia Stiles and Aaron Eckhart teaming up in a revival of "Oleanna," David Mamet's play which has previously stirred up audiences.

The production will open a 13-week run April 22 at a theater still to be determined. The run will mark the British stage debuts of its two stars, both of whom are far better known on film.

Stiles, 22, has long been a teen movie favorite in films including "Save the Last Dance" and "10 Things I Hate About You." Eckhart, 35, made his name in such Neil LaBute films as "In the Company of Men," "Your Friends and Neighbors," "Nurse Betty" and, most recently, "Possession" opposite Gwyneth Paltrow.

Mamet's play—first seen off-Broadway in 1992 with William H. Macy and Mamet's wife, Rebecca Pidgeon—will feature Stiles as Carol, a student who develops a combative, ultimately destructive relationship with her teacher, John (played by Eckhart). During the New York run, audiences were known to shout back at the stage or storm out of the theater as they took sides with one or the other of the characters.

The play was highly acclaimed in its first London production in 1993 at the Royal Court, directed by Harold Pinter, where both roles were played by British performers. Lindsay Posner will direct this new revival.

Hunter supports friend Vera Wang

NEW YORK (AP)—Holly Hunter sat in the front row at the Vera Wang fashion show Wednesday to support her designer friend, she said—not to shop for her Oscar gown.

But Hunter, nominated for best supporting actress for "thirteen," surely noticed the pretty, nude-colored tulle dresses that Wang sent down the runway.

"Vera has been my friend for 10 years. She dresses me for everything, from the Oscars to today," said Hunter, dressed in a black pantsuit. (Wang designed the black illusion

gown Hunter wore when she won the Academy Award for best actress for 1993's "The Piano.")

The petite 45-year-old told The Associated Press she counts on Wang for her wardrobe because the designer "understands dressing for a small woman."

She said more than a decade of walking the red carpet has taught her always to try on a dress before she lets herself fall in love with it.

"I know that I have to be comfortable—especially in my shoes. And the dress has to be

infinitely wearable because it feels like you have it on for 25 hours!" she said.

Besides the gowns she's best known for, Wang offered several day looks at the show presented during New York Fashion Week, including skirts and slacks with tweed-belt waistbands and a bow blouse in a brown, orange and teal floral print.

Fashion Week continues through Friday with Ralph Lauren, Calvin Klein and Donna Karan among the collections still to be seen.

Singer Lou Rawls settles suit for \$35,000

LOS ANGELES (AP)—Lou Rawls has settled a lawsuit with a woman who claimed she gave up her business to become his mistress.

The soul singer will pay Margaret Schaffer \$35,000 to settle her \$12 million lawsuit which claimed he backed out of a verbal agreement to support her financially even if they split.

Rawls' spokesman, David Brokaw, called the claim a "nuisance" lawsuit and said that while the singer was acquainted with the woman, the two had never dated.

"Mr. and Mrs. Rawls settled

for the sole purpose of removing Schaffer from their lives," Brokaw said after Monday's settlement.

In the lawsuit, Schaffer said she met Rawls, 68, in February 1998 and moved into his Southern California home shortly afterward.

They entered into an oral agreement in November 1998 "to treat as joint property income and earnings," according to the lawsuit. Rawls also agreed to pay her what she would have earned in her job, Schaffer said, adding he promised lifetime support even "in the event their

Country singer Terri Clark rejects Playboy

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP)—Country singer Terri Clark is keeping her cowboy hat—and the rest of her clothes—on.

Clark, whose hits include "I Just Wanna Be Mad," said Tuesday that she has rejected an offer to appear on the cover of Playboy magazine for the May music issue.

"I'm mostly just a regular ol' girl who likes to have fun, play her guitar, drink some tequila,

hang out with my friends. Exotic beauties and total sexpots get asked to do the cover of Playboy, not girls like me," she said in a statement.

The Canadian-born Clark, who usually wears a cowboy hat while performing, said she was pleased that Playboy realized "I'm not typical



Clark

and the experts evidently saw something in me that said a normal-size woman can be sexy."

Ultimately she didn't think the appearance was right for her image, the 35-year-old singer said.

"But for me, even as full-tilt as I am, there are just some things I can't quite get comfortable with."

Pastimes

WONDERWORD By DAVID OUELLET

HOW TO PLAY: All the words listed below appear in the puzzle — horizontally, vertically, diagonally, even backward. Find them and CIRCLE THEIR LETTERS ONLY. DO NOT CIRCLE THE WORD. The leftover letters spell the Wonderword.

WORKING PART-TIME Solution: 10 letters

R K C S E C I F F O S S O B R
E O A B E R O T S E T E R O O
M O B W C A A M C K E E W J T
M C S A E L S R P F M D A C C
U O L S L X E O E U R E A C A
S L V H P T P R N E T R B D H
S Y O E A E R E K A T E R A C
T M G R R Y R R R N L I R Y S
E A Y U I A O I O I V A I S T
W A X P T W Y C O E E N B N D
A W R I T E R T R D C N E S E
I S O L S T A F F O I D C M R
T N E M Y O L P M E U C I E I
E T E L A V A E T T E T A A H
R S K I L L S R S H I F T L M

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Actor, Boss, Cabs, Calls, Caretaker, Clerk, Computer, Contract, Cook, Days, Driver, Early, Employment, Experience, Ferry, Hired, Home, Income, Job, Labor, Labs, Maid, Mover, Office, Periodical, Remuneration, Salary, Seasonal, Secretary, Seeder, Sell, Shift, Skills, Staff, Store, Student, Summer, Taxi, Teach, Time, Valet, Wage, Waiter, Washer-up, Week, Worker, Writer.

Yesterday's Answer: Children

NOTE: Postage and handling charges have changed for The Collected Wonderword. Add \$3 for the first book ordered, \$1 more for each additional book. Volumes 17 and 18 are \$5.95 each, payable to Universal Press Syndicate, 450 Main St., Kansas City, Mo. 64111 or call toll-free, 1-800-255-6794, ext. 6813.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS

1 — a plea
4 Hopalong Cassidy
8 Cereal choice
12 Fuss
13 A woodwind
14 Garage job
15 Hamlet's "advisor"
17 Never again
18 Swann's chronicler
19 Seesaw quorum
21 Bang-up time
22 Line segment
26 Region of India
29 Trot
30 Playtex product
31 Laugh-a-minute
32 Demure
33 Likes a lot
34 Coach Par-seghian
35 Bestow knight-hood on
36 Kentucky Derby wreath

DOWN

1 Dog-patch's "founder"
2 Stench
3 Pastime on ponies
4 Dwarf tree
5 Last writes
6 Whom Uncle Sam wanted
7 Ruin
8 With 33-Down, Red Cross helper
9 Skedaddle
10 Easy as —
11 Born
16 Word of obligation

37 Mensa contender
39 X rating
40 Period
41 Squished squares
45 Amahl's night visitors
48 "Hair" song
50 Part of B.&O.
51 Cartoonist West-over
52 Army rank (Abbr.)
53 Date provider
54 Salt amount
55 Thumbs-up vote

20 Vacillate
23 Wading bird
24 Incite
25 Lip
26 Friction between engine parts
27 Green acres
28 Library trans-action
29 Exemplar of
32 Ingredient in zuppa inglese
33 See 8-Down
35 Pair
36 Go over old material
38 Turn of phrase
39 Secure tightly
42 Isinglass
43 Channel marker
44 Capri, e.g.
45 Clear the decks?
46 "Eureka!"
47 Hodges of baseball
49 Sine-non link

Solution time: 25 mins.

WEAR LIMB PIG
ERNE ADAR IRA
SINGAPORE NON
TEARUP TWANG
EX MOTIF
BEST NIL GOBS
IVY AND RAH
DECK ICE GERE
AISLE AR
COMMA AMAZON
AGO CARNIVORE
BRR CLOT ELAM
SEE OPTS LALO

Yesterday's answer 2-13

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11
12 13 14
15 16 17
18 19 20
21 22 23 24 25
26 27 28 29 30
31 32 33
34 35 36
37 38 39
40 41 42 43 44
45 46 47 48 49
50 51 52
53 54 55

STUMPED? For answers to today's crossword, call 1-900-226-5955! 99¢ per minute, touch-tone/rotary phones. (18+ only.) A King Features service, NYC.

CELEBRITIES BORN ON THIS DAY
Stockard Channing, Peter Gabriel, Kim Novak, Peter Tork

HAPPY BIRTHDAY: This is not the year to dwell on the past. Everything you have done will contribute to what you can do now. This is the beginning of things to come, so don't waste one more minute in fear of not being able to finish what you start. Your numbers are 10, 13, 19, 28, 37, 46

ARIES (March 21-April 19)
Double-check your bankbook to make sure that everything is in order. Putting your money into home improvements or an investment that is safe, but rewarding, should be your intent. ★★

TAURUS (April 20-May 20)
You can enjoy a very good time with someone you love if you are attentive and affectionate. If you are neglectful, you can expect him or her to become possessive and insecure. Build up your partner's self-esteem by talking about your future together. ★★

GEMINI (May 21-June 20)
The changes that are going on around you will turn out to be positive if you give things a chance to settle down. Sit tight and be professional. ★★

CANCER (June 21-July 22)
Develop one of your skills and you will soon be able to make extra cash doing something you enjoy. Travel and searching for knowledge will enhance your awareness. ★★★★★

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22)
You will have to think on your feet today. One slip of the tongue and you may be doing unnecessary backtracking. Don't let anyone talk you into following a path that doesn't suit you. ★★

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22)
Get together with friends who will push you to follow through with your plans. Someone you meet will influence the choices you make. Be receptive. ★★★★★

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 22)
You can make changes regarding your direction. Money matters will get better if you are happy with what you are doing. If you make a few sacrifices, things will improve. ★★

SCORPIO (Oct. 23-Nov. 21)
You will be highly creative and very into changing your mind or your direction today. The outcome of the changes you make will be beneficial and probably long overdue. ★★

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21)
The more you can do to make your place more comfortable, the better. Your home is your space to do as you please and enjoy yourself. Make arrangements to help out a family member. ★★

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19)
Partnerships will be advantageous and lead to a prosperous turn of events. Listen to what others have to say, draw your conclusions and proceed with your ideas and suggestions. ★★★★★

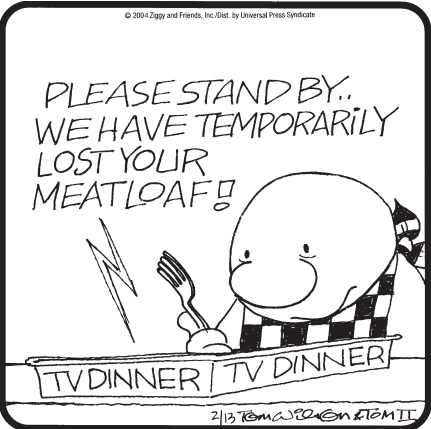
AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18)
You may have trouble getting your point across. Someone may lead you in the wrong direction or misinterpret what you are trying to convey. Keep your mind clear. ★★

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20)
This is a perfect day to scout for information that will open your eyes to the possibilities that surround you. Wasted opportunities will result in frustration. Follow your heart. ★★★★★

BIRTHDAY BABY: You are surefooted and eager to follow your chosen path. You are confident, outgoing and a born leader. You are competitive and will never back down from anything or anyone.

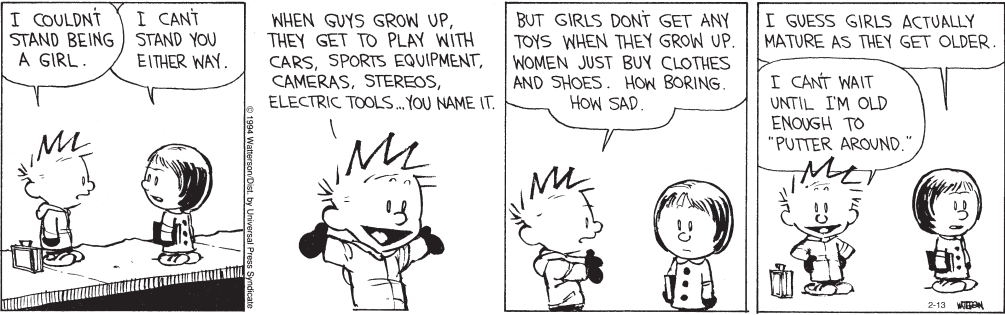
(Need advice? Check out Eugenia on the Web at www.astroadvice.com or www.eugenialast.com.)

Ziggy®



Calvin and Hobbes

By Bill Watterson



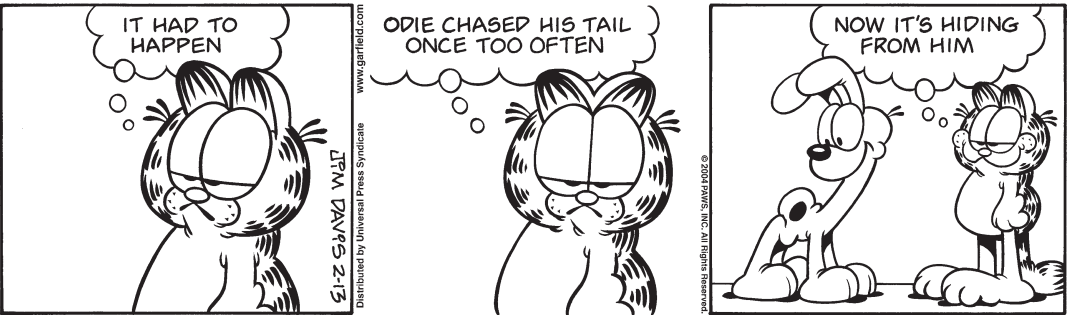
Adam@home

By Brian Basset



Garfield®

by Jim Davis



The Duplex

By Glenn McCoy



Pastimes



NBA STANDINGS					
EASTERN CONFERENCE					
Atlantic Division					
	W	L	Pct	G	
New Jersey	39	25	.609	-	
Philadelphia	37	26	.587	1 1/2	
Boston	37	27	.578	2	
Orlando	33	33	.500	7	
Washington	31	33	.484	8	
New York	28	36	.438	11	
Miami	21	43	.328	18	
Central Division					
Detroit	40	23	.635	-	
Indiana	38	27	.585	3	
New Orleans	37	29	.561	4 1/2	
Milwaukee	32	33	.492	9	
Atlanta	26	39	.400	15	
Chicago	23	43	.348	18 1/2	
Toronto	20	42	.323	19 1/2	
Cleveland	11	53	.172	29 1/2	
WESTERN CONFERENCE					
Midwest Division					
Dallas	48	15	.762	-	
San Antonio	45	18	.714	3	
Minnesota	42	25	.627	8	
Utah	37	27	.578	11 1/2	
Houston	33	30	.524	15	
Memphis	23	41	.359	25 1/2	
Denver	14	51	.215	35	
Pacific Division					
Sacramento	45	19	.703	-	
Portland	42	22	.656	3	
L.A. Lakers	35	28	.556	9 1/2	
Phoenix	33	30	.524	11 1/2	
Golden State	31	33	.484	14	
Seattle	28	34	.452	16	
L.A. Clippers	20	44	.313	25	

NBA STANDINGS		
EASTERN CONFERENCE		
Atlantic Division		
Team	W	L
New Jersey	31	14
Boston	26	19
Philadelphia	24	22
Orlando	24	23
Washington	22	24
New York	19	25
Miami	16	29
Central Division		
Indiana	33	13
Detroit	29	15
New Orleans	24	22
Milwaukee	22	22
Chicago	17	28
Atlanta	17	29
Toronto	11	34
Cleveland	9	37
WESTERN CONFERENCE		
Midwest Division		
Dallas	35	9
San Antonio	29	16
Minnesota	27	18
Utah	27	18
Houston	24	20
Memphis	13	31
Denver	10	35
Pacific Division		
Sacramento	32	14
Portland	28	16
Phoenix	26	21
L.A. Lakers	20	23
Seattle	20	23
Golden State	20	24
L.A. Clippers	17	28

NBA STANDINGS		
EASTERN CONFERENCE		
Atlantic Division		
Orlando	2	0
New Jersey	1	0
Philadelphia	1	1
Boston	0	1
Miami	0	1
New York	0	1
Washington	0	1
Central Division		
Chicago	1	0
Detroit	1	0
Indiana	1	0
Toronto	1	0
New Orleans	0	0
Atlanta	0	1
Cleveland	0	1
Milwaukee	0	1
WESTERN CONFERENCE		
Midwest Division		
Dallas	1	0
Minnesota	1	0
San Antonio	1	0
Utah	0	0
Denver	0	1
Houston	0	1
Memphis	0	1
Pacific Division		
Sacramento	1	0
Portland	1	0
Golden State	0	0
L.A. Clippers	0	0
Phoenix	0	0
Seattle	0	0
L.A. Lakers	0	2
Wednesday's Games		
Chicago 99, Boston 96		
Indiana 91, Houston 82		
Toronto 74, Washington 68		
Philadelphia 95, Milwaukee 93		
Orlando 100, Miami 86		
New Jersey 105, Atlanta 94		
Dallas 119, Memphis 108		
Minnesota 83, Denver 77		
Detroit 86, New York 77		
Portland 102, L.A. Lakers 90		

Team	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	T
Giants	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	-	3	
Hustlers	1	0	1	4	2	0	0	5	-	13



SPORTS BRIEFS



Spurs defeat Mavericks, 111-104

Tony Parker scored a career-high 32 points, including seven free throws in the final minute, to lead the San Antonio Spurs to a 111-104 win over the division rival Dallas Mavericks on Wednesday night.

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Saipan Tribune
Sports

Yearend RGA champion tourney tomorrow

The Refaluwasch Golf Association will hold their yearend Club Champion Tournament tomorrow, December 14, at the Lao Lao West golf course.

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